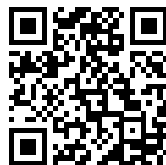


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# NO HANDICAP

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MARION AMES TAGGART



To  
Master H. Gile  
From  
Sr. M. Carver

June 19, 1928



**NO HANDICAP**



# NO HANDICAP

A Novel

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART

*Author of "The Cable"*



EX LIBRIS  
A. G. GILE.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

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**To  
The Memory Of  
That Great Jesuit  
FATHER ROBERT FULTON  
A Debt That Cannot Be Paid**



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# NO HANDICAP

## CHAPTER I

*"The Friends Thou Hast and Their Adoption  
Tried—"*

**T**WO young men swung down the street at a rapid pace, hurrying from the mere stress of abundant health, although the afternoon was before them, its hours free. The taller of the two turned out to the curb in order to swing his leg over a cement mounting-block which stood there, his rapid gait not giving him sufficient vent for the tumultuous youth in his veins.

He was a big fellow, long of limb, broad of sinew and flesh; he carried his head high and thrown back as if he were impatient of restraint, daring all things, thirsting to try his courage. His eyes were dark, deeply blue, honest eyes, steady, yet hungrily alert, seeking for life and its meanings. His mouth was large, well-cut, humorous and kindly, but the lips came together with a slight compression that did not suggest yielding, nor did his somewhat large, handsome nose, with its defined bridge and arched nostrils, indicate ready compliance with other people's views and programmes.

His companion was half a head shorter, slenderly built, lithe grace in every movement. He had a sensitive face lighted by beautiful brown eyes; his dark thick hair waved back from a high forehead. It was the face of an idealist capable of intense devotion to a cause, to an individual, a face that was

saved from effeminacy only by a look of determination, as of one governed by singleness of purpose, aflame with intellectual, rather than physical vitality, but it was a face completely saved from effeminacy by this look, and it was a face of great physical and spiritual beauty.

"That's the block Justin Coburn had made for the fair Miss Justine Coburn to mount that Kentucky thoroughbred he's bought for her. And she rides mighty well, too! You ought not to kick your long, irreverent legs over that hallowed block, Pete, you heathen!" protested the more slender young man.

"Didn't kick legs; only one, Giles, you ninny!" retorted Peter Cassett cheerfully. "What should I have stood on while I was kicking my legs, my feeble-minded buddy? No Coburn kick coming as long as the Lady Justine wasn't standing on that block when I kicked over it! Plenty of people in Woodcock kick worse'n that over a Coburn block! They're sore over his prosperity, but I don't see what's wrong about it. Justin Coburn gives full value for the prices he gets, and if he's got a thing everybody wants, and holds it at his own price, I can't see anything to growl about. There are always people who get a sort of colic that ties them up in hard knots when they see somebody forging ahead. If they had the capacity to forge they wouldn't be wasting time—and mental colic!—on someone else, but that they never perceive. And Mr. Coburn boosts the city, that's sure. What do you say, Monk? Why don't you answer your betters?"

"Say, I wonder why I don't?" Giles Guernsey echoed derisively. "Did you ever hear anyone argue with Niagara?"

"Never heard anything at Niagara, not even the Falls; never was there. You go to Niagara when you get married, Giles, my son, and so I haven't been there yet," said Peter.

"Well, if you do get there," said Giles, but speaking with a slight effort, his color heightened, "you'll see what chance a person has answering a torrent. You know I don't see a thing wrong with Justin Coburn; I'm no Socialist; I'm a more or less edifying Roman Catholic, I am, and if you'd get to Mass once in a while you'd know it without being told."

Peter Cassett immediately drew off and punched Giles, who came back at him; then they walked on more slowly, each with his arm over the other's shoulder.

"I suppose I told you that I've some hope of being taken on by Coburn, Owen and Fitts, didn't I?" Giles continued.

"You sure did not!" cried Peter. "I wonder what gives it to you? Mr. Coburn might consider employing a Catholic, but J. Wesley Owen, or Roscoe Fitts—heavens, Monk!"

"My father was able to do Mr. Coburn a good turn that mattered to him a lot. He expressed a desire to prove his appreciation, and dad told him that if he saw a way to give a berth to his son, his handsome, clever, noble, good son, why it would not only cancel the debt, if Mr. Coburn felt indebted, but give him a valuable assistant in his business. And Mr. Coburn seemed to think it might be a go," Giles Guernsey explained.

Peter Cassett groaned heavily. "Poor Justin Coburn!" he said. "He'd be Justin Martyr, all right! But I don't believe those barnacles he's got



growing on his firm will agree to it, so don't order a special suit from your tailor, Brother Giles."

"I have an idea that Justin Coburn doesn't take down their dictation to an unlimited number of words, Petey," returned Giles. "It's time we were starting in somewhere, Hermit."

Because of Brother Giles, the companion of St. Francis of Assisi, Peter had evolved the nickname of "the Monk," shortened to "Monk" for his closest friend, who, in turn, and by the same sort of evolution, dubbed Peter "the Hermit," than which nothing could have been less appropriate to the jolly, friendly boy, though that made it the more satisfactory.

"We are twenty-three years old and going strong, shall be twenty-four, if we don't watch out," Peter agreed. "Time we pulled on over-alls and rolled up our sleeves. Sometimes I'm a bit sorry we took that extra course, but I guess not; it sort of put an ell and a cupola on my brain."

"That's it," agreed Giles. "I don't care for business any more than I ever did, Hermit. If this Coburn scheme pans out, of course, I'll take the place, but if it doesn't I shall be as well satisfied. I'd rather build houses, and more especially churches, on paper. What's the use of having a profession and not use it? The Coburn chance would be too good to turn down, but if it turns me down, then: 'Giles Guernsey, Architect'! Glass sign, neat letters, plain, but distinguished! Now you're all business, Petey; you'd put anything through that you touched, regular dynamo!"

"Yes," Peter assented. "I can see myself having a pretty good time making things hum. I've an idea that a man who has energy, brains, industry, can get

there with both feet without shading his principles not a stroke! I'd like to try it. It's worth doing, Monk! Making a fortune, being a power in the land to be reckoned with, yet not so much as cracking one of the Ten Commandments; being known as a Catholic that gets on his knees in a confessional frequently, who won't compromise, yet who by sheer strength of brain and will, and—yes! by that same sacramental strength—is a big fighter and a winner!"

Peter threw back his head, his eyes bright, his color high, and with the back of his hand shoved back his hair, hatless, and with reddish tints over its chestnut brown in the sunshine.

Giles looked at him with the worship in his eyes which from his fifth year he had paid Peter Cassett.

"You'll get there with both feet whatever you undertake, old Peter!" he said. "I was talking you over with Father Coigne the other day, telling him pretty much what you've just said of your ambitions. And he said it was a pretty hard goal to set yourself, hard to win, hard to run toward, but he said it was the knightly ambition, expressed in twentieth century vernacular: To keep your soul clean, your arms bright, and win glory for your Lady, whose gauge you bore. There's nothing the matter with Father Gregory Coigne, Hermit! I'm glad he was sent here, since old Father Whittle had to be retired. Speaking of the gauge and the Lady, you know, Hermit—though of course Father Coigne meant the Church, or Our Lady, I'm not sure which—but, well—Oh, what's the use? We've spoken of it before and we both know! There's Isabelle."

The friends had by this time walked beyond the

city streets built in blocks; they had reached the pretty outskirts with their suburban effects, houses standing apart in the midst of well-kept lawns and flower beds, streets of shaded quiet, restful to eye and ear.

Peter Cassett swung toward Giles impatiently.

"There's Isabelle? Where's Isabelle? I don't see her," he exclaimed. "Look here, Giles, we agreed to be sensible, so let's stick to our bargain. What about Isabelle Chatillon?"

"You are the better man, Pete," said Giles. "We both love her, we both want to marry her. But you are the biggest chap in the world, and you'll do in it what I never could do. I wouldn't like to see you denied what means as much as Isabelle means. With her, worn like a sort of shield on your arm, you'd be the knight Father Coigne told about. Isabelle ought to be for you. I—I—I don't want to stick to our bargain, Hermit. I want to get out for a while and let you have full sweep."

"Oh, you chump!" cried Peter affectionately, looking at Giles with love equal to the love in Giles' eyes for him. "I've told you before that Isabelle is not to be treated like a superior doll, disposed of by drawing a chance in her. She is to choose between us—if she doesn't surprise us both by choosing someone else! Now, if that happened, I surely would take it hard! But if she prefers you to me, why, old Monk, that would only prove that I was right to love her, that she was a girl worth loving! We've decided that nothing shall ever come between us. Only one of us can have Isabelle for his wife. All right; then that other one will still be her friend, as he is her husband's best pal. We'll drop this,

Giles, from now on, and let each do his best to make Isabelle love him. One of us will take her, the other take defeat standing and smiling, but take it shoulder to shoulder, just as we've stood for so long."

"Oh, Peter Cassett, it's all very fine, but should we be as good chums as before? Shall I be brave enough to sit at your hearth and see Isabelle established in your house, its mistress, your wife? God knows, I think she should be there, and I don't grudge you anything, not even Isabelle, but—could I stand it?" Giles spoke with a sort of subdued violence, and Peter laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It might be a little awkward at first, I'll admit, Monk," he said gently. "It might necessitate, say a long trip, before we got running well, on all cylinders. But, sure you could do it! What else could you do? We never could stand it long apart! But I'll give you a straight tip, Monk: You'll never be called upon to stand it, and I'll guarantee to make a go of it when it comes to me. Isabelle has already chosen, Giles, you dunce! She doesn't realize it herself, but I know it. Isabelle is heaps fonder of me than I deserve; I can make her laugh; she tells me things that show how she trusts me and likes me. I'm big and sort of lively, you know, and she likes me around, but that's not the idea, as you know as well as I do. Isabelle is half afraid of you. She hangs all sorts of dreams on you. She puts you in the story book she's reading, and it's you she has in mind when the author describes the hero. She's as free and confiding with me as if I were Peter Chatillon, her big brother. She orders me around and bangs me over the head with that little soft hand of

here—figuratively speaking—when I don't come up to the mark, her mark! She would never think of setting a mark for you, let alone criticizing the way you toed it. Not I, but you, old Giles, is Isabelle in love with; you can't deny these symptoms." Peter put both hands on Giles' shoulders, facing him, and looked into Giles' troubled, yet enkindling eyes, with a steady kindness that was half paternal. "Say, old pal, I'm not going to say I always enjoy these things I see. I don't. I'm not giving up hope of Isabelle yet; it may be that I'm wrong and that she'll surprise me some day, but I don't think so. I want Isabelle, but so do you, and Isabelle will want you—and take you, what's more—when the time comes. Go ahead and get her. I'd rather she married you than any man on earth—except me! And I know she'd better marry you than me, because you're 'way ahead of me. So it's all right. And long past wedding bells till the trump of doom sounds, Giles Guernsey, you and I will be the fast friends we are now."

"You bet we will be!" Giles spoke softly, with a slight shake in his voice. "Not even for Isabelle would I—but I think I ought to go away for a while. I think I shall go away; I'd be better satisfied afterward. You know, Pete, I'm one of that mooning sort of chaps; I sort of go along. If I have a book, or a brush in my hand, or even a crayon, I seem to go along, as I said. But you! You're not like that. You're a volcano, or dynamo; perhaps a man covers it, when it's a live man, like you, Pete. Things hit you hard. If things go wrong with you they'll go bad all over. There's that in you, Hermit, that would make me dread to see you up against it. When you want a thing you want it like the deuce. If fate

knocked you down—I don't know, Pete! Honestly, I don't know just what it would do to you! At any rate, I don't want you to lose out through any gain of mine. I'd like to get out for a while."

Peter Cassett turned away, his face crimson, his lips set. He began to go through calisthenics, throwing out his arms, bringing them back with a thump against his broad chest, a tall, athletic figure against the cloudless sky, as he and Giles paused on the bank of the river to which they had come at the end of their walk.

"I don't mind owning up to you, Monk, because you know all about me as it is," Peter said. "I suppose things do hit me hard. You know I used to get going when we were kids, and you always had sense; I'd work up to a point when I was bursting; then I'd burst! But a man can't continue to be a boy. After all, we're past twenty, Monk! If I'm the sort of man that's a storage battery, such as you describe, then I've got to apply that force decently; that's my job. I've a suspicion that God Almighty, who usually sees to it that we're offered our chance to shape ourselves in the way we most need whittling, will give Peter Cassett a few lessons in patience and in laying down his headstrong will. I admit I've got a rip-roaring devil in me, but, if I'm the strong chap you call me, I ought to be able to throttle him. I'm no end fond of using my muscles, my arms and hands, my long legs that can run and leap with the best of 'em! Let's hope, Monk, that I'll like to use the other kind of strength; I admit it isn't nearly as attractive! But, after all, we Catholics don't call it *fate* hitting us, as you did just now. It's something kinder than fate, even though it hurts. I

suspect I'll have to begin my training by being best man at your marriage to Isabelle Chatillon, Giles, my boy, and that it won't hurt me a bit to get the conceit taken out of me. I'm so dead sure of myself! Isabelle knows a good thing when she sees it! I'm prepared for the worst, Giles! No; by George, I'm not! The worst thing would be if Isabelle was so used to us from her childhood that she didn't fall in love with either of us, but got pleased with some new chap who came to town! We want to keep her for our own sakes; there isn't a girl anywhere who's in the same class with our Isa! And we want to keep her for her sake. We wouldn't know whether the new man was half-way decent or not, nor whether he might not beat her! Pray heaven, Isabelle does fall in love with you, Monk—or with me! Shall we go to see her? The stranger may have come to town this afternoon, and gone up to the house to ask for Mr. Chatillon, and bowled Isabelle right over! Come on, Monk! Let's hurry over there and make her love us, one of us!"

At first Giles had been listening to Peter with his eyes troubled, gazing vacantly across the river, his forehead drawn into a frown. But as Peter went on, his words coming fast, as Peter's words always came, his mellow voice, with the note of merriment, that was not far removed from pathos, in it, the voice which could always sway Giles to his will and to his mood, Giles' brow smoothed, his eyes turned adoringly upon Peter, and at the end he laughed, as Peter meant him to laugh.

"You perfect idiot!" Giles said. "You old bluffer! I wonder what will come to you? It ought to be a big thing. We've got nerve, both of us, to talk

about marrying any girl before we've so much as begun to get on our feet! You've got some money, and, of course, whatever you go into will go with a rush, but I've only my father's money, and he has the girls to look after, first of all. Suppose we chuck everything, Pete, and light right out together to make our fortunes? Both of us give up Isabelle, and stick together? Sure as guns, I don't think that would be half bad!"

Peter shook his head.

"We were born in Woodcock, and—you can't chuck Isabelle, Giles! Isabelle is ingrafted into our lives. We both love her; one of us will marry her, the one she chooses. After that, the other fellow might go off, if he liked, but not till then, and not together. Hard to say why, because we'd both half-way prefer that to stand the loss of Isabelle together, not feel that one had profited by the other's loss. However, it can't be done, Monk, so that's the end of it! Funny old life, isn't it? Everybody making a great row about individual freedom, nations and men, and there's no such thing as freedom! We're all wound up, and oftener than not bound up, in all sorts of ways, with all sorts of people! We can't run off together; I don't know exactly why we can't, but it's so!" Peter swung his arms as he spoke, caught at a tree branch, drew himself up by it to a second, and a third, higher branch, swung out several times like a pendulum, then dropped, laughing, to his feet.

"I wish Brother Jim were here," sighed Giles.

"What the—who under the canopy is brother Jim?" cried Peter.

"Don't know, but I want to quote: 'A little child, dear brother Jim . . . that feels its life in every



limb,' though I believe Wordsworth didn't write that 'Brother Jim' in that poem," said Giles.

"Meaning me?" inquired Peter, touching his breast. "Say, you can be a nut all right, when nuts are in season, can't you, Monk? But meaning me? Am I 'the little child who feels his life in every limb'? That's because I have but two limbs; I mightn't feel it in every one of them if there were more. But I admit it; I'm boiling over with wasted energy, and I do like to use this big, strong me! Say, Monk dear, come and buy a new tie before we go to Isabelle's! Let me pick out a corker, becoming and classy, so you can begin at once to outshine that stranger in town!"

"Oh, shut up, Peter, you nuisance! I'm not going to Isabelle's, though I don't suppose you thought I would," cried Giles, half annoyed, half laughing. "Will you go with me to-night and sing for us?"

Peter shook his head. "Can't; Thursday," he said.

"That's so! But you'll be through by nine. Didn't you say Father Coigne asked you to take from eight to nine?" Giles asked.

"Last week only," Peter said. "No; I have to take from eight to midnight for some time. Two of the men dropped out, and there's no one to take their places. I'm to have four hours' adoration, or else there'll be a break in it."

Giles looked at him without a word, but in his heart he thought:

"Big, husky, daring Pete! Who'd think of him, unless they knew him, keeping four hours of the Perpetual Adoration! Oh, Isabelle ought to love him best!"

## CHAPTER II

*"She That Was Ever Fair and Never Proud."*

A SERIES of events had swept out of Peter Cassett's life the other members of his family while he was a growing boy. A posthumous child, his mother had died when he was fourteen years old, two younger sisters had died of scarlet fever before that, and another boy, older than Peter, had not lived six months.

Peter had been left with a decent fortune, enough for comfort, not permitting too much luxury, the ideal condition for a man whose philosophy of life is sound. His mother's will committed the lad for guardianship and education into the hands of one of the Catholic Religious Orders, and Peter passed out of those hands, into the world, a great youth as to his body, not in the least a small one as to mind and soul.

He had never been the good boy of story books; if there was mischief afoot the Fathers knew that, however remote from Peter its source appeared to be, he was surely at the bottom of it, if they could but prove it—and rarely they could prove it. The most currish boy in school, the one most anxious to curry favor at the cost of betraying another, hesitated to "tell on Peter Cassett," partly because he had a ready generosity from which all of his school fellows profited, and partly because it was not prudent to betray Peter Cassett; the big boy's trouncing was a thing to avoid.

Peter did not come in for the most severe punishments for his scampishness; some of the boys murmured at "favoritism," but in their hearts they knew that it was because Peter never lied, stood up to the guns unflinchingly, often thus sheltering another, and because there was not an ounce of malice, nor meanness in his whole big body. He broke rules and played tricks from sheer animal spirits, nor did he break the rules which governed serious matters of right and wrong; he had a sensitive conscience and his own definite code, and, more often than the quiet boys, Peter might be found in the chapel alone, always with his head down on his folded arms, humble and intense. The lonely boy turned his warm heart to God, and for lesser love gave his to Giles Guernsey, his classmate from his own town. After his graduation, Peter stayed on with Giles Guernsey at the college for a post-graduate course in the classics, while Giles studied architecture under a European priest, one of those men with an untold history behind them who are often found in the Religious Orders; he was a man who knew the cathedrals of Europe as if he had carried the stones to them when they were building, who could and did give Giles precisely the training which he coveted.

Peter took his post-graduate course partly because he honestly cared about his Greek and Latin, partly because he particularly liked the lean priest who taught them; chiefly because he dreaded to be separated from Giles, and to go out into a world that held for him none of the ties which make going home a thing for which to hunger.

When these supplementary years were past, and going home unescapable, Peter took a small house

in a pleasant street of the small city of Woodcock, acquired a woman competent and glad to look after him, and set up his own little hearthstone, which took the form of a register and an ugly gas grate.

It seemed an extraordinary thing for a boy of twenty-two to do, but Peter defended it.

"I'm not going to herd in a boarding house!" he declared. "I'm not going to get gossip dyspepsia at a boarding-house table, with all the food tasting alike, and all the idle women turning cannibals between courses. No, sir; I'm going to live like a human being, not like a Red Rhode Island rooster in a poultry yard!"

So "like a human being" young Peter Cassett lived in his small butter-colored house while the days sped over him in which he was deciding what to do with his vigorous young manhood; obviously, no one with Peter's strength and Peter's conscience would idly live a useless life.

And then there was Isabelle Chatillon. Peter and Giles had played with her as children, not much, because she was only a girl, but at intervals of condescension, or boredom. Now she was twenty years old, and Peter discovered to his amazement that she filled his horizon. He knew enough to know that he was in love with her, that of all earthly things she was the one pre-eminently to be desired. He was not experienced, but the Greeks and Latins wrote well of love; Peter recognized his own symptoms. At the same time he had discovered—and the discovery had cost him dearly—that Giles also loved her. He "would never run against old Giles," Peter told himself.

It was some time before these friends confessed

the truth to each other, and agreed to carry out their programme of continuing their intimate friendship with Isabelle till she should prefer one to the other of them. After that, the defeated one would hide his hurt, and love both Isabelle and her husband in truest friendship, in loyalty and content. The almost superhuman qualities this would require in them, both Peter and Giles were too young, too inexperienced to know; thus far, in taking no advantage one over the other, in believing that each would rather see the other victor, they had fulfilled their compact.

On the day after his walk with Giles out to the suburban limit, to the river, Peter answered a call on his telephone. It was Isabelle's soft, clear voice which he heard saying: "That you, Peter?" and Peter acknowledged his identity. "I want you, Peter," Isabelle said. "I'm always wanting you, am I not, poor Peter? But what should I ever do if I hadn't you! Are you going to be busy this afternoon? No? Then will you be the good boy you always are and come here?"

"Surest thing you know!" Peter called back in a mild roar. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, I'd hear better if you didn't talk so loud, you vigorous Peter!" Isabelle cried. "I've done some ridiculous thing to my car, and the man in the garage out here whom I trust, is away; I don't want the other man to touch it, and I can't drive it in to the big garage because of the ridiculous thing I've done to it. It won't start! Oh, Peter, I know you can fix it up; will you please come and try?"

"I certainly will!" Peter assured her. "About three, or so? All right, Isabelle; your little Petey won't fail you."

"And don't you tell me after you get here, that it was a mere trifle which I ought to have seen for myself, and that a girl can't run a car because she has no mechanical sense, now mind that, Peter Cassett! Good-bye. As soon after three as you can make it, then; I'll be on the lookout for you. Good-bye, you Reliance!" So saying, Isabelle hung up her receiver, and Peter turned toward his sitting room with such a light upon his face as it was fortunate for his peace of mind that Giles Guernsey could not see.

"Isabelle, God bless you!" he said, almost aloud. "What a voice! It goes on singing in your ears—if I could hear it always, all my life! Close beside me. If she cared, if she could care about me! Her Reliance! Indeed and indeed, I'd be that to her! God deal with me as I deserve if ever I fail her—Her! And Giles! I've got to look out; I can't fail Giles either. And if she likes him best—as she does! Ah, Pete, you great, hulking idiot, you know it well! She's got to trust me with her happiness as far as I can compass it. Pete climb down! Isabelle's calling you, and needing you, and relying on you, you know quite well is not loving you. And, after all, how would I face myself if I did get her, and poor old Giles—"

Peter walked over and wound the clock, though it was not his day for winding it. He wondered at the few turns it required, and aroused to what he was doing. He went to his easy chair and dropped into it, putting his hand on his setter's head, who had been watching him from beneath his domed front, furtively moving his tail in slow flaps, realizing that his master was disturbed; like a true friend and

gentleman waiting to offer his sympathy when it should be timely.

"Off my trolley, old chap!" Peter said, and the dog instantly was up on his hind legs, his fore-paws on Peter's arms, wagging his plumed tail vehemently, looking adoringly into Peter's face.

"Say, Canis Major, love's a queer thing! Isabelle's voice stole my senses. And you, now, you think I'm about right, don't you, Canis? By George, Canis Major, I wouldn't like to try dying and leaving you! I honestly believe you wouldn't survive my loss! I wonder why we all pick out one special person and hang all our hope and happiness on that one? It's a great mystery, when you come to think of it! And someone else strolls along and doesn't see that the person for want of whom you die—or your happiness dies—is in any way superior to lots of other people, just a nice girl, or a good sort of fellow, as the case may be! And here are you and I, Canis, my splendid chum, all bound up in that person till there's nothing else visible! Now, I ask you why, Canis Major, why?"

Peter's dog all this time had been answering his philosophical question as only it can be answered by dog or man. He frantically tried to show his love for Peter in some new, convincing way, pawing his chest, hitching his body nearer and nearer to his master, thrusting forward his beautiful head into Peter's shoulder, whimpering, occasionally breaking into sharp, short barks of eager protestation. And Peter understood the answer.

"Right you are, Canis Major! I find you a satisfactory thinker. The answer is that you do love me. More and more love is the answer to the mystery of

loving at all! That's about all there is to it, my dog, and I'm mighty glad I have you. I hope I'll never whimper over my lot; I've Giles and you, two loyal friends, each the best that comes, in his own way. How about lunch, Canis? Shall we go and inquire into it? I'll take you with me to see Isabelle this afternoon. She likes you tremendously, and she's not the kind of girl to wear a gown that a dog can spoil."

Peter arose as he spoke; Canis Major curvetted and leaped before him to the door, perfectly understanding that he was to be taken somewhere; dog and man were alike in that it did not matter where they went as long as in that place was the dearest person in all the world.

Fifteen minutes to three found Peter Cassett and Canis Major wandering around the block below the Chatillon house in order not to appear at it before the earliest time set for Peter's coming. Peter even forced himself to dally till seven minutes after three, but at that time he rang the bell.

Isabelle Chatillon's grandfather had come from France with his young wife by way of Canada, and had wandered southward into the States, and had settled in what was then Clear River, now rechristened and grown into the lively city of Woodcock. The elder Chatillon's son, Louis Chatillon, had married a sweet girl, had prospered, had been blessed with four sons and his one daughter, Isabelle, had taken refuge among the books which he loved when his wife had died, and now lived, with Isabelle, the head of his house, his sons married and gone, a peaceful life, retired upon a modest fortune, a student and a recluse.



The Chatillon house was one of the most truly beautiful houses in the city, indeed it was one of the few that satisfied Giles Guernsey's trained eye by its simplicity of line, its dignified suitability to its setting. It stood upon the upper boundary of Woodcock, with a deep turfed lawn, and arching trees before it, expressive of its owner's attitude toward his neighbors, an aloofness that was not unkindly, but sheltered from intrusive eyes.

When Peter rang the bell of this beautiful house, a trim maid opened the door to him, but immediately behind her appeared a small, slender girl, with an oval face, sweet in the outline of its delicate cheeks, olive in tint, framed by masses of smooth, dark hair, lighted by vivacious dark eyes, warmed by full red lips of the sweetest curves and flexibility—Isabelle.

"Oh, Peter, you are good to me!" cried Isabelle, putting out her hand with such hearty welcome that she did not wince when Peter half crushed it in his hand.

"No, not at all!"

"No! Don't you charge, Canis, you dear thing! Of course he is to come in, Peter! Don't tell him to charge out here. What harm can he do, the dear dog? But suppose we all go right out to the garage and get it over with? Then you can come in, and take your ease without a roadster running over your mind!"

Peter laughed. "I'd hate a roadster running over any part of me, Isabelle. But it's a good rule to do what has to be done, and have it over with. I don't suppose it will take long; I don't imagine there's much wrong with the car, but—"

"Peter!" Isabelle interrupted him reproachfully. "I just knew you'd say that, and didn't I particularly forbid it, over the telephone? There is something wrong with the little sinner! It won't start. And I did look at all the things you told me to look at if it ever cut up. Come out to the garage, then, and it's good of you, but please don't say superior things to me, because, though I'm a girl, I don't want to be considered a mere girl."

"Not much fear of 'mereness' in the way I think of you, Isabelle," Peter said, following Isabelle to the garage, while Canis Major followed him.

Peter threw aside his coat and began his investigations. Almost instantly he looked up at Isabelle, standing anxiously beside him, and laughed.

"There isn't any electricity stored up, something wrong with the connection. It is hard to start when you haven't any electricity, Isa!" he said.

"Peter! But I did forget all about looking at that!" cried Isabelle. "Oh, Peter, I cave! You may say anything to me you please. A mere girl is all that I am, so stupid!"

"It doesn't matter that you forgot to look at the storage record, Isabelle; anyone may forget almost anything; forgetfulness is not stupidity," said Peter consolingly. "You couldn't have fixed her up if you had discovered it wasn't storing. I'll have it working in no time."

"You are so nice, and such a comfort, Peter!" sighed Isabelle. "Wait till I throw this blanket down for you to kneel on; you mustn't immolate those trousers for my car. Truly, Peter, I do appreciate you!"

"Appreciate means a just estimate; don't you exag-

gerate my services, Isabelle," suggested Peter, annoyed by her praise, which he felt sure she would not have bestowed so freely had there been more behind it than a hearty liking for him.

The roadster once more made to fulfill its duty, Peter went with Isabelle into the house, and Canis Major, by her gracious permission, went with his master.

Happily humming under her breath, as if she liked to serve Peter in the intimacy of fetching a pretty little guest towel and a small cake of soap, Isabelle waited on Peter, till entirely free from stains, and redolent of violet, Peter dropped comfortably into one of the many chairs designed to fit the human body, in which the Chatillon living room was rich, and Canis Major, bestowed himself at his master's feet.

"Giles has an idea that he may get a position through Mr. Coburn, in his employ," Peter said. He wanted to talk of other things, of Peter Cassett, but the underlying cause of that desire drove him to speak of Giles.

Isabelle shook her head, and laughed.

"You two Damian - Pythias - David - Jonathan friends!" she cried. "When you come here you immediately begin to talk of Giles; when Giles comes he immediately begins to talk of you! It's downright funny, but it's much, much nicer than it is funny! Oh, but he won't, Peter! Won't get a position with that firm, I mean. Mr. Fitts and Mr. Owen are too high-principled to tolerate a Catholic."

"So I told Giles," Peter agreed. "It is probably better; Giles wants to be an architect."

"Father thinks that he has a great deal of talent,"

said Isabelle, with a slight hesitation in her voice, a slightly heightened color in her olive cheeks. "Giles has told me something of his wish to build beautiful churches; I'm sure he could, or rather father thinks he could; I wouldn't be able to judge, of course. Peter, shouldn't we be proud and glad if Giles some day were the greatest Catholic architect in the United States? If we could kneel under a vast vaulted nave, and look up into the arches and say to ourselves: Giles Guernsey raised this to the honor and glory of God, and to inspire men's faith, Giles Guernsey, the boy I played with!"

Isabelle spoke with a breathless enthusiasm, her voice subdued, but only to greater intensity of expression; her eyes kindled, her cheeks reddened, she looked more beautiful, Peter thought, than he had ever seen her, more passionately to be desired, but never so unobtainable. It was Giles; he had been right.

"I should be proud of Giles no matter what he did," said poor Peter, speaking with difficulty and hating himself for the difficulty, compelling himself to play the part which, he was thankful afterward to know, he had wanted to play, cost what it would. "But yes, of course, Isabelle, I should be proud and glad if he had shown the world what was in him, which we don't need showing. He's clever, but he's better than clever, he's the finest fellow. But you know what I think of the Monk, and nobody knows him as I do."

Isabelle laughed again. "I should know what you think of him, also what he thinks of you!" she cried. "The funniest part of it is that you say the same thing of each other! Giles says: 'You don't know Peter as I do; no one can, and he's the greatest chap

in all the world.' Peter says: 'Giles is clever, but he's better than clever; he is the finest fellow—but you know what I think of the Monk, and nobody knows him as I do.' "

He managed a laugh, but his heart was sore within him and refused to smile with his lips. He had seen Isabelle's love for Giles when she had lifted the curtain behind which it was hidden; she did not know herself what she had revealed, perhaps not what she hid, but Peter had seen it.

"Sing to me, Peter!" Isabelle cried. "That will keep me out of wrongdoing; I feel like a saint when you are singing, Peter Cassett!"

Peter's voice was a gift from heaven that seemed to hold within it an echo of its source. It was a baritone that at times rose into pure tenor notes, a voice mellow, caressing, dramatic, pathetic. He used it well, with sufficient knowledge of the art of singing to place and control it properly, yet not to sacrifice the charm which had been its birthright, which over-cultivation might have lessened.

While he sang to Isabelle, Peter knew that she was entirely his own, that for her, with her musical feeling, her emotional nature, nothing, no one else existed while Peter's lovely voice enfolded her senses.

He arose and went to the piano, not unwilling to comply with her request. If this voice had been given to him it was his weapon; all creatures are armed to protect their own existence, and Isabelle was his life. Giles could not sing; what was that to Peter? It was he who had been thus endowed, and, Giles or no Giles, he would sing to Isabelle and hold her fast for a brief hour. Hurt, wretchedly suffering, Peter let himself go for the moment. Isa-

belle was not yet Giles' betrothed; had they not made a compact that he who could win her should win her?

Peter sang and sang, and Isabelle listened. Never had she heard him sing like this! Song after song of almost unendurable beauty, sung as a disembodied spirit might sing which had passed beyond concealment. Simple songs, piteous, pleading songs, tragic songs, despairing songs, and songs that called upon love to follow unafraid, but not one song of joy, Peter sang to Isabelle.

She listened motionless, afraid to lose a note, afraid of Peter, of herself, of the overpowering possibilities of woe which lay beyond her, in the life upon whose threshold her weak girl-hands were knocking.

At last Peter's hands dropped upon the keys in a blurred discord, and he sat for a moment, his head bowed upon his breast. He had wooed Isabelle with his voice in spite of his resolution; he hoped that she had not understood.

"Oh, Peter!" Isabelle sighed, stirring a little. "What a gift! How you sing! You never sang like that before! When you sing, Peter, I would do whatever you asked of me; I would follow you to the ends of the earth!"

Did she realize what she was saying? She was young, and her sheltered life had kept her younger than her years. And she loved Giles!

Peter laughed aloud, pushing temptation from him, and the laugh was harsh. Because he could sing, should he betray his friend?

"And when I stopped singing, and you found yourself at the ends of the earth, with no one near but big Peter Cassett, wouldn't you wake up and

curse the singing pied piper, Isabelle dear?" he said.

He got off the piano stool awkwardly, sliding to one side, and spoke sharply to Canis Major.

"Come home, Canis; we've stayed too long. Singing is the dickens to make you forget what o'clock it is. Good-bye, Isabelle; see you soon."

With which abrupt adieu Peter took his departure.

### CHAPTER III

*"Absent Thee from Felicity Awhile."*

**T**HAT evening, being sure that Giles would call upon him to join in something, quite possibly to go together to see Isabelle, and not feeling equal to playing his part with Giles that night, immediately after supper Peter whistled to Canis Major and went for a long, rapid tramp beyond the city, along the river. Peter found healing in violent exercise and long reaches of sky and trees. When the turbulent spirit which had been given him to rule became a difficult task, in one mood Peter would go to the church for a long time before the tabernacle, letting the fraught silence master him. In another mood he took refuge in miles of tramping the country roads, as to-night, when the anger against himself for having sung to Isabelle as he had sung, and the hunger for her that consumed him, demanded physical vent.

He came home beaten down into utter weariness, even Canis Major drooped. Peter went to bed and at once to sleep with his programme arranged, once more master of himself.

Peter hurried off in the morning to Mass. Father Coigne's assistant said Mass at seven, but Father Coigne's hour was half after seven, and Peter wanted to serve him, if he were fortunate enough to find the altar boys as delinquent about coming as they were likely to be on week days.

There was no altar boy to serve, and Peter served, as he had hoped to. Tall and broad always, he



looked larger than ever in the sanctuary in contrast to slender, short Father Coigne, but upon Peter's face rested the expression of a wistful child who might have been fresh from punishment at a beloved hand.

"May I go into the house after you've had breakfast, Father?" said Peter in the sacristy after Mass, as he drained the cruets and hung them, reversed, in their rack. "I want to talk to you."

"No," said the priest, "you may not. You may come in with me and sit with Father Lennon and me while we eat, though. And you may have a cup of coffee with us, even a crust of toast. Then we'll go upstairs afterward and thresh it out."

"You know I'm in a mess, don't you?" Peter chuckled, enjoying Father Coigne's penetration. "I have threshed it out, though, Father. However, I do want to tell you my ideas. I've had breakfast, thanks."

"Did I mention breakfast?" demanded Father Coigne. "I spoke of a crust, and my cousin Rose's coffee is not to be regarded as a part of breakfast; it is ambrosia for our delectation. But you shall do as you please, Peter the Great, as to eating; not about coming in with me. And now go say your beads while I make my thanksgiving, and say one decade for my intention; I have a case on my hands—!"

The priest threw up those hands to express the condition and difficulty of his case, and Peter repaired to the first pew in the church, while Father Coigne went out to the crimson cushioned prie-dieu in the sanctuary and straightway forgot Peter and his "case", his face buried in his thin hands.

"Ready, my boy?" Father Coigne asked Peter, laying his hand on Peter's shoulder as he left the sanctuary; Peter, also, had forgotten for a moment all but his petition, that he was waiting for the priest.

The plain dining room, flooded with sunshine, was restfully pleasant. The table was spotless, the dishes tasteful, but inexpensive; everything necessary for health and comfort, and a little more than that, was on the priest's table and in every room of his house, but kept within the bounds of simplicity.

"Why should I have what my means would not purchase? My means are a thousand dollars a year, which isn't much these days," Father Coigne would say when he refused a gift that meant too great beauty or luxury. "How can I talk to some poor chap with a big family and small means about frugality, when I keep a house for myself that gives him a chance to come back at me with: 'It's easy to talk, but look the way you're set up!' No, no! I've got to practise what I preach if I expect to get my sermons home, and it's for me to set an example. Besides that, it's my experience that it's easier to soar when you don't clog yourself with fine broad-cloth, handsome damask, the idea that the best of this world's none too good for a priest leading others to a better world! Mortification, mortification! Self-denial is the safeguard against denying your Master, in one or another way. Rather a plain life here than a long purgatory for Father Gregory Coigne! And on top of all, there are always the hungry of soul and body that must be fed by our sacrifices!"

So this saintly priest lived simply, with commonsensed frugality that provided amply for health, and

his people did as he bade them, knowing that there was no opening in his practice that could excuse their criticism, nor their failure to obey his precept.

Peter looked at the priest that morning with new appreciation. He was of less than medium height, slenderly built. His hair was partly grey, partly keeping its youthful black. His eyes were deep-set, dark, full of fire and keenness, eyes from which little could be hidden, but eyes that spoke of mercy; warm eyes that smiled on all things, man and beast. His mouth was a grieving mouth, deep cut in the corners, slightly drooping, but as ready to laughter as the alert eyes promised it to be. The entire face was intensely a living face, most vital, high-spirited; yet it was patient, with the patience that is beaten into a man. It was the face of a man set free, who pitied the enslaved, the face of an intensely human ascetic.

Peter yielded to persuasion and the aroma of "Cousin Rose's coffee," and shared the priests' breakfast in one cup of coffee and a half slice of buttered toast. Young Father Lennon was an attractive youthful Levite, slightly older than Peter, full of the nervous zeal of his recently conferred priesthood, anxious to be at ease and friendly with this big young man whom Father Coigne had brought in, not quite certain what Peter would like him to do, and obviously worshipping Father Coigne as his first superior and a great priest.

"Well, now then!" observed Father Coigne, folding his napkin, but afterward making sure no drop of coffee remained in his cup. "I see you've finished your bite and sup, my Peter the Great. It was just that, or hardly more—three bites and sups, it may have been! If you like, we'll go up to the sitting

room and I'll have my pipe while you chat. Let's see; you don't smoke, Peter the Great?"

"Oh, my, no, Father!" Peter laughed. "I do tatting instead!"

"Exactly! I'll furnish you with a briarwood—shuttle, don't they call it?" said Father Coigne, preceding Peter out of the room.

"I have my shuttle with me," said Peter, producing from his coat pocket a short-stemmed pipe. "Not much to look at, but it's as sweet as they come."

"Now that's the safest sort of companion, not too handsome, but perfectly sweet," Father Coigne approved him, and went to the table in his sitting room to fill for himself his own unornamental pipe. He offered Peter his tobacco box.

"Had a present of this from the Jewish tobacconist down on High Street," the priest said. "I had a chance to pull his boy out of what would have been a bad scrape; quite a nice boy, but training in the wrong company, and now Mr. Stein is my devoted friend."

"It's fine tobacco, Father," remarked Peter.

"Nothing better," Father Coigne agreed. "No Jew ever stints himself when he is trying to prove gratitude, and they can feel gratitude, too! I often drop in there to talk theology; it's easy enough to do, because they have no theology."

Peter smiled without speaking, and Father Coigne watched his downcast face as he plugged his pipe with the tip of his little finger.

"Looks older, losing his boyhood," thought the priest. "I'm ready to hear and advise, Peter the Great," he observed.

"I think I'm going to get out of Woodcock," said

Peter.

"What's wrong with Woodcock? Nice little city, to my mind," said Father Coigne.

"Father, Giles and I have both fallen deeply in love with Isabelle Chatillon. It's—it's the real thing with both of us. We've agreed to go ahead, play straight, but go ahead, and the one that she chooses is to take her without bothering about the other one. We try to make ourselves believe that we can stand it—the one who loses out—and keep right on, just the same pals as ever. But it can't be done!" Peter burst out with his story.

"It doesn't seem possible. I've been dreading the day when you boys would find out that you had set your hearts on the same prize, which could fall to but one of you," Father Coigne said quietly.

"You knew about it?" cried Peter.

"Oh, dear me, yes; long before you did, before you went back for your post-graduates," said the priest. "Isabelle had grown into your lives as you matured, and she is a girl to love. I'm afraid it will go hard with you, both of you, for the one she marries will wretchedly be haunted by the other's pain. I'm sorry enough, Peter."

"It is going to be Giles, Father. I have watched and I know I'm right. She likes me too well to love me—"

"Ah, hadst thou liked me less and loved me more,  
Through all those summer days of joy and rain,  
I had not now been sorrow's heritor,  
Or stood a lackey in the House of Pain.'"

murmured Father Coigne.

"Did you—?" Peter hesitated.

"Only a stanza of Oscar Wilde's; I should not have said that I remembered it. He had a pretty way with words. Go on, poor Peter," said Father Coigne. "And I am afraid you are entirely right about Isabelle."

"I am," Peter said. "Father, upon my honor, I don't want to take Isabelle from Giles. In a sense, but in a true sense, I love Giles more than I do her."

"That is true; I know that it is true. Such love as yours and Giles' surpasses the love of woman. But the love of woman is desire, and you must want to possess Isabelle at the cost of your friend's pain," said Father Coigne.

"Ah, how you understand us!" cried Peter. "Father, I have promised myself to do nothing to filch Isabelle, even if I can. Yes, but wait! Yesterday I sang to her, and I broke my word! While I was singing I was stealing her. Father, I must go away! I dare not trust myself. I must get out of here. I loathe myself, but I almost let go." Peter's head bowed and he caught his breath.

"Ah, Peter the Great," said Father Coigne with great tenderness, "you will never let go; you loathe yourself, poor boy. It was hard on you."

"Where shall I go? I've got to quit," insisted Peter, his voice unsteady as he heard Father Coigne's pity.

"I don't know on the moment. You shall go somewhere, if it is best. I'd like you to put off going for a few days," said Father Coigne, inwardly resolving to make sure that it was Giles, not Peter, whom Isabelle preferred.

"I'll tell you, Peter the Great, I was going to see you to ask a favor of you. You've heard of the

affair that's on for the Associated Charities, to get funds for the winter? St. John's parish has to take part, and I want it to be a creditable part. Will you enter for the races? If you do we'll whip the town! I'd like to see a Methodist, or Presbyterian, that could hold his own against those fine, trained legs of yours! And you're fine and fit, you never got a bit soft leaving college!"

"I've kept in training at the gym," said Peter, looking bewildered by this sudden change of theme, but enkindling, as Father Coigne had counted on his enkindling, at the prospect of the sport he loved. "I'll enter, if you like, Father, of course."

"Then St. John's parish carries off the prize for the dash, the high jumping and the five mile race!" triumphed Father Coigne, rising. "Bless your heart, Peter the Great; I knew I could count on you! You'll excuse me, Peter? I've got to go out to the end of nowhere to look up that case I had you say a decade for—you didn't forget it? Good boy! Suppose we postpone considering our troubles until after the Marathon—or whatever they're going to call it? Maybe something will happen by that time to guide us. If not, I'll help you out of Woodcock; I promise it. And go to it, Peter, with all that's in you, to win the races for me. You're our champion."

"All right, Father; I'll enter my name, and then I'll train regularly. I'm grateful to you, Father Coigne. You're mighty good to me. I feel better for my visit," said Peter, taking his leave.

"Well, it's postponing the issue, but I had to hearten him somehow, and there's no medicine, aside from supernatural help, will do Peter the good that athletics will now. He's a great man, my young

Peter the Great!" thought the wise priest with a sigh and a smile.

On his way down the street, hastening to enter his name for the "Woodcock Marathon," as he saw the posters announcing the occasion, Peter came up with Mr. Justin Coburn, the man who was the most successful business man in Woodcock, whose firm was mounting high in the ranks of business concerns of larger cities, the firm in which Giles Guernsey's father, though not Giles himself, was anxious that Giles might be employed.

"Good morning, Mr. Cassett," said Mr. Coburn, ignoring the fact that he had known the young man as "Peter" when he was a small boy. "I am fortunate in meeting you. Why is it that so proficient an athlete as you are is not entered for our marathon?"

"I hadn't thought of entering, Mr. Coburn, but I'm on my way now to enter," said Peter.

"Quite right, quite right," Mr. Coburn approved him. "May I ask you to register on our team? The Central Presbyterian Church's team—but, of course, you know my church connection."

Peter did. The Coburn Memorial window in that church, memorializing Mr. Coburn's mother, was considered by Woodcock to be its proudest boast, raising the city close behind Durham cathedral, or almost any Old World cathedral which possesses what is respectfully mentioned, with a mental capital, as Glass.

"Sorry to refuse you, Mr. Coburn, but I've just promised Father Coigne to enter as St. John's champion. Not that it will matter; all you care about is to have the affair turn out well, and turn in cash for the charities," cried Peter.



Mr. Coburn looked Peter over thoughtfully, a slight frown on his face.

"I can't say that is *all* that I care about. One has the honor of his own family at heart, and one's church is in something the same relation to a man," he said gravely. "But a promise is a promise; I would not ask you to break yours, though I doubt that I could get you away from Father Coigne. An excellent priest, an excellent *man*, which is to my mind saying a great deal more, for the qualities which go to make a priest are instilled, whereas God Himself makes the man."

There was no mistaking the satisfaction with which Mr. Coburn uttered this piece of profound thought, at once profound and Protestant, to the enlightenment of a misguided youth.

Peter did not answer; the street was no place, Justin Coburn no person for a discussion.

"Would be kind of a pity to give him a jounce, though I certainly could do it!" thought Peter.

Mr. Coburn went on, proving by his next remark that he sincerely liked Peter.

"Mr. Guernsey, the father of your friend Giles Guernsey, has suggested my taking on his son into my employ, Mr. Cassett," Mr. Coburn said. "I have considered it, and decided against it. I have learned that Giles Guernsey, while he is in every way an estimable character, has no aptness for business, on the contrary, has a keen desire to be an architect. That being the case, it would be folly for me to take him on. Do you agree with me?"

"Well, Mr. Coburn," said Peter, "if you got Giles you'd get what doesn't grow on every bush. He's as clever as he can be; he's the soul of sensitive honor;

he's as clean living as your own daughter, Justine, and that's a list! And I know him, inside and out. But as to business—well, I believe Giles will be glad that you decided against him. He does want to be an architect, and I suppose there's no use trying to make a business man out of an artist."

"Quite so," Mr. Coburn accepted Peter's approval graciously. "And you, Mr. Cassett? Have you no plans? I can imagine you valuable to a business concern."

"I'd like to go into business, Mr. Coburn. I've been thinking about it. I wanted to get my bearings after I came out of college, before I started in. I expect to start in soon, now; likely not in Woodcock," replied Peter.

"I have considered offering you a position in our house, Mr. Cassett," said the great man solemnly; he spoke of "Our House" as though it were the ruling house of an ancient kingdom. "Would you care to consider it, if it were offered you?"

"That's mighty nice of you, Mr. Coburn!" cried Peter sincerely, much surprised at the suggestion from the head of a firm to which, Peter had believed, Giles' Faith would have made him unwelcome.

"I appreciate this from you; I truly do. If I stay in Woodcock I certainly should be delighted to have the offer made me. But it seems to me more than probable that I shall leave Woodcock soon. I can't quite be sure—not either way."

"It is not necessary to say more now. You will note that I have not made the offer; I tell you merely that I am considering making it. It will depend upon certain contingencies."

"The partners, Roscoe Fitts, J. Wesley Owen,"

Peter supplemented him in his thoughts.

"But it may come about." Mr. Coburn was serenely unconscious of Peter's mental commentary. "I know that the high praise which you have given your friend, young Guernsey, is equally applicable to you. I know your life, Mr. Cassett; I have been at pains to acquire that knowledge. I am an experienced man of the world, and I realize the worth to an employer of a man whose life is stainless, whose honor is unimpeachable. I may be ready to invite you into my employ later on."

"Thanks, Mr. Coburn," said Peter, naturally pleased with this tribute, but still more amazed by it. "We'll see what happens; I'm unsettled in my mind just now. I'm grateful to you for your kind opinion of me; I truly am."

Mr. Justin Coburn looked, as Peter told Giles later, "exactly as he sounded." He was a heavy, slow-moving man, with a solemn face, pale, his cheeks always darkened by a beard that shaded it after the closest shaving. His grey eyes were overhung by thick brows; he wore serious, close-buttoned coats, and a derby that repudiated frivolity; his gloves were dark grey mocha, heavily stitched with black. He smiled gravely as he lifted the derby in farewell and to acknowledge Peter's thanks.

"By the way, Mr. Cassett, you mentioned my daughter Justine's—Miss Coburn's—name just now. You and she knew each other as children better than now, if I recall your early days correctly," he said. "She said to me that she would like to see you; if I happened to meet you, she asked me to tell you so. She did not tell me why; probably it is in connection with arrangements for the Marathon, in which she

is greatly interested. Miss Coburn is profoundly interested in all charity movements. Will you be kind enough to call upon her as soon as you find time? Thank you. Good day, Mr. Cassett."

The great man and Peter resumed their opposite ways.

## CHAPTER IV

### *"Young in Limbs, in Judgment Old."*

PETER went straightway to enter his name for the races in the "Woodcock Marathon." He had a strong affection for his native city, but the idea of a Woodcock Marathon tickled his sense of humor. Woodcock was a pretty place; its situation did much for it, rising as it did from the side of a sleeping river. It was backed at a ten miles' distance by an amphitheatre of low hills.

But Woodcock took itself more seriously than Peter Cassett was able to take it; there was something almost portentously solemn in the way a true hatchling of Woodcock spoke of anything that emanated from, or belonged to the town. There was a preponderance of grave and reverend seignors among its prominent citizens, men—and notably their wives—who felt their responsibility to support the various religious denominations which were struggling to convert the heathen to the knowledge of the Bible and to spiritual reconstructing of morals.

Peter Cassett found this at times funny, at times irksome, always pitiable when he stopped to reflect what it actually meant. He told Giles once that "in their zeal to abolish the worship of images they had fallen into the way of worshipping the niches." Peter had not been so put together as to have much patience with unreality. The registration of contestants in the Field Day sports, as Peter corrected the name in his own mind, was made in the Y. M.

C. A. building, the building, which beyond all others of its glories, Woodcock vaunted.

He was received by an urbane gentleman whom he knew to be Mr. Samuel Babcock, the superintendent of the Sunday School of the First Baptist church, and the leader of the Bible Class of the Y. M. C. A.; he was said to "have great influence among the Woodcock youths." His smile was at once condescending and deprecating, and he softly rubbed his hands over each other, reversing the direction of the movement regularly, as he came forward, smilingly to greet Peter.

"Ah, my dear young man, you do not know me, but I know you! Peter Cassett is a figure in Woodcock, highly esteemed by my boys for his athletic prowess. You are very welcome here. I trust that you have come to enroll yourself among those who are to enter into a friendly struggle in order to serve the poor. A most worthy cause! 'Let us so run as to obtain the crown,' as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, a people addicted to sports, and so able to grasp the full value of the apostle's figure of speech, illustrating the combat of life, for an incorruptible crown. I suppose it is not possible that you have come to enroll yourself as a student of the Scriptures in the Y. M. C. A. Bible class, of which I am the unworthy teacher?" he said, getting into his welcoming address as much as was possible of moral benefit.

"I'm going to run in the races, and enter for the high jumping, Mr. Babcock," said Peter. "Do you take down the names?"

"And you know my name!" said Mr. Babcock, smiling admiringly. "I hardly thought that you would; I hardly thought so, Peter Cassett! Yes, I

am the recording angel for the time being, only for the time being." He smiled, and waited for Peter to appreciate this, his characteristic brand of humor, but as Peter showed no sign of amusement, but looked a trifle grim, he added:

"If you will step over there to the table, I will enter your name, Mr. Cassett. Are you to enter as a free lance, merely for the pleasure of the contest, and for the good of the cause—I am sure it is also for the good of the cause, for it is a privilege to feed the poor who are always with us, as we are told on scriptural authority—or are you enlisted under a particular corps?"

"Im going to run for St. John's church; Father Coigne wants me to get into it," said Peter. "Put me down as St. John's entry."

"Champion is a better word," Mr. Babcock gently corrected him. "Very well, my dear young man. I could have wished—but there would be no use in my telling you what I would wish—for your own soul's sake, entirely for the sake of your soul, dear lad!"

"Not a bit; no kind of use, Mr. Babcock. Put me down as St. John's champion, if you like it better, and let it go at that! Speaking of names, it's a funny thing to find a Greek Marathon hitched up with an American Woodcock, isn't it? Wonder who christened the thing? I suppose it would hurt their feelings to call it a Field Day! Funny old name for a town anyway, Woodcock!" said Peter, characteristically freeing his mind when he was not called upon to do so, with cheerful confidence that he should offend no one.

Mr. Babcock refrained from saying that it was

he who had suggested the name for the Sports Day, upon which he prided himself; Mr. Babcock made a point of never freeing his mind, but of carefully keeping from offence. Instead of answering as to the Field Day title, he said:

"Does Woodcock strike you as a curious name? Well, perhaps it is, perhaps it is, though there are many names more odd in our great country, especially in the western section of it. Now this town was named for my grandfather, Amos Babcock. The original name, given it by its settlers, Clear River, those who lived here in my grandfather's time wished to change, and they desired to name it for the man among them who stood highest in their esteem. My grandfather, Amos Babcock, Mr. Cassett, although it is I who say it, was one of the most godly men that ever helped to bring our great republic to its present perfection. I am wholly unworthy to claim descent from him, though in my poor way I strive to labor in the vineyard of the Lord. But my grandfather was uncompromising in his principles. He read the Bible through every year of his long life; to him I owe the practise in my own life. He fought hard against the saloon in our midst, and it was due to him that never was the Roman—I mean—the women of the town had water piped into their houses to lighten labor."

Mr. Babcock extricated himself with skill from the sentence which he had begun, and glanced furtively at Peter to see if he had known what he had meant to say, but Peter's face was blankly attentive.

"My grandfather married and buried three wives, and the fourth, an excellent, though irascible woman, survived him," Mr. Babcock continued. "The men



of Clear River wanted, therefore, to name this town after him, but my grandfather's modesty neld them up. 'Not for me, my brothers,' I am assured that he said. 'Not for such a worm as me. Call our town Canaan, or Eben-ezer, or even Remembrance, but do not call it for one who is the least among you.' Such was my grandfather's humility, for he knew that he was far from being the least among them. So they named the place for him indirectly, heeding his remonstrance, and called it Woodcock. And it so annoyed my grandfather that he made a codicil to his will, and withdrew from the town the endowment which he had made as a gift to it, for a chapel to be built among the foreigners already come here to work in the mills. I understand that your priest has a chapel there now, so my grandfather's indignation wrought—you see, Mr. Cassett, what a history is bound up in the name of our city, the history of a godly man! Thus it was called Woodcock!" Mr. Babcock ended, pulling himself up abruptly.

"Wonderful!" said Peter. "The name will sound different to me from this on. Good-bye, Mr. Babcock; I've detained you too long."

Peter went rapidly down the street, whistling under his breath, then he began to hum to the tune of "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag":

"Don't believe that Woodcock flight—  
Lies, lies, lies!  
Like to get Babcock out on some dark night,  
For a good surprise!"

This crude chant made Peter completely and childishly happy, and he went on humming it till the name of a street which he had begun to cross arrested his

eyes, and he paused.

"Mr. Coburn told me Justine wanted to see me! Better go there now; I've time," he thought, and turned back, went up the street, and, midway to the next block went up the walk that led to a fine house, standing, though in the heart of the city, in the midst of a beautiful lawn; up the two tiers of four steps each, demanded by its terrace, and rang the bell.

"Is Miss Coburn at home?" Peter asked the white-capped, white-aproned maid who responded to his summons. "Please tell her Mr. Peter Cassett is here. I have no card," Peter added, realizing that a tray was proffered him.

The maid ushered Peter into the drawing room and withdrew. He was noting how high-ceiled and splendid the room was, which he had not seen for some time, when the maid returned to say that Miss Justine would be down immediately, and disappeared soft-footed and correct.

Justine's "immediately" meant that; she was less than five minutes in appearing, and Peter arose to greet her, feeling genuine pleasure in seeing her again.

Justine Coburn was the one child of her parents; her father idolized her, lived for her, succeeded in business triumphant that Justine would have immense wealth. She was a tall girl, long of limb and line, thin with the thinness of her build, not of flesh. She carried herself well, with great dignity and a certain elegance. She was not pretty; her complexion was good, pale and clear, her eyes were fine; they were intellectual eyes, without feminine allure. Justine was singularly destitute of allure; it would have been hard to imagine anyone charmed by her; it

would have been impossible to imagine anyone not trusting her, admiring her, liking her heartily if he knew her well. Her face was eager, hungry, it could be severe; it was remarkably intelligent, and to one who was capable of reading faces it would have revealed an immense capacity for devotion, for love. A diffidence of her power to please, in spite of her wealth and position—perhaps because of it, lest she be sought for it—made Justine Coburn put forth no effort to win love through the pretty coquetries of a woman's legitimate game to win it. She was a noble girl, but rather a pitiable one who shut herself away from self-revelation. Her father would have been horrified at the suggestion that in any way his splendid girl needed pity.

"Well, Peter Cassett, I wonder that I recognize you, it is so long since I've seen you!" Justine said, and when she spoke one realized that Justine had one great charm; her voice was absolutely lovely.

"Isn't that so, Justine!" cried Peter. "And yet I'm no end glad to see you again! Funny how we can let day after day go by, and not do something we like awfully to do—like coming to see you!"

"I think we all do the things that we like awfully to do," said Justine. One of her drawbacks in her dealings with young men was her irresistible impulse to correct the pleasant trifles, not to the letter true, which are the current coin of social intercourse. "But we were good friends as children, Peter, and I am still your good friend."

"My gracious, Justine, surely you know I'm yours!" cried Peter with unmistakable sincerity. "We're grown up, plus taken up, each in our own way. We were jolly little chums, you, and Giles,

and—and Isabelle, and I, weren't we?"

"We did have good times, though you and Giles only condescended to Isabelle and me when nothing better offered," Justine smiled at him her frank, half grave smile. "Do you remember that we used to play house, and you both wanted Isabelle for your wife, never tall, lank me?"

"Yes, maybe; I suppose it was partly because she was so little," admitted Peter.

"Thanks for that partly, Peter; you haven't forgotten that I appreciate honesty," said Justine.

"I remember that we thought it was the most exquisite, subtle humor to call you 'Dusting'! Remember that?" asked Peter.

"*You did; I didn't!*" Justine corrected him smilingly. "But adult humor is not always more humorous. It was pleasant to be a little girl—" She checked herself, and said, as if she wanted to get away from reminiscences:

"I am glad that you came here to-day, Peter. I wanted to see you. I asked father to tell you so, if he saw you."

"Yes, I met him; he told me," said Peter.

Justine's face changed slightly; she seemed to withdraw a little farther into herself.

"Thank you, then, for coming so promptly," she said. "I wanted to ask you, Peter, to take part in this Marathon—the name is silly, but the aim is not! I inquired if you had registered. I was looking for recruits, and you are so well-known as an athlete that you naturally occurred to me; they told me you had not registered, so I want to ask you if you will take part in my—in our group?"

"Now that's a pity, Justine, because I'd like to

help you out, if I could! But I'd just been talking to Father Coigne before I met your father, and Father Coigne had asked me to represent the parish, and I said I would, of course. I've come from enrolling straight here. Sorry to fail you, Justine, but it's too late," Peter said, and was sorry to disappoint Justine.

"Oh, well; it's all for the cause. But it does count to have one's own group victors; we'd have won if we'd had you. Giles isn't in it," said Justine.

"Neither was I till this morning; Father Coigne set me at it. Giles isn't long on the sport suit! What's your group? Presbyterian Church?" asked Peter, but Justine's reply was deferred by the entrance of her mother, who came forward to greet Peter. Mrs. Coburn was as tall, and far thinner than Justine. She had a fretful face, covered as if with a veil, by close, fine wrinkles. She had none of her daughter's nobility of face and bearing; she was a semi-invalid, always complaining, invariably ready to seize, or find, openings to describe her symptoms to all and everyone.

After she had spoken to Peter, she settled herself in a comfortable chair, hands folded over a handkerchief in her lap, as if she intended to be an audience to the conversation. Peter rather wondered at this attitude, but turned to Justine as she at last answered him:

"Yes and no, Peter. It is the Presbyterian Church from which we come, yet we are an independent unit in the charitable work of the city. I am not a member of the church, though father and mother are," Justine answered.

"She thinks that she is wiser than the elders and

the presbyters," said Mrs. Coburn disgustedly. "No one asks her to believe the Presbyterian doctrines, if she doesn't want to; our minister doesn't mind, but she won't join the church unless she can say she believes its teachings. Why, we've all got far beyond that narrow old way!"

Justine glanced quickly at Peter, and her color mounted; she hastened to continue her own explanation as she read the expression of his eyes.

"We are a sort of Home Missionary band, independent of the church, though it helps us with funds; the Central Presbyterian is rich," Justine said. "We work among the foreigners, the Italians down in what they call the Woodcock Claw; you know that crowded, poor district, Peter. I am tremendously interested in my work. They are dear, those sweet Italians, especially those soft-eyed, intelligent children."

"Are you working there, Justine?" exclaimed Peter. "See here, Justine, we are old friends, even if we don't see each other often nowadays, and you love honesty. Let me beg of you to let those people alone; I mean, let their faith alone! You'd expect me to want them to keep it, since it's my own faith, but you can't possibly understand what you're doing, if you weaken it."

"Why, Peter!" cried Justine surprised, but liking this appeal which found an echo, not in her convictions, but in her nature. "I don't teach them religion; I can't; I don't know what I think about it myself. I teach them morality, ethics, cleanliness of body and mind, and I clothe and feed them. Is that wrong? We moderns don't proselytize; we are ceasing to be dogmatic. The modern attitude is that

we are all going the same way, and the end is not too certain, so we must tolerate all opinions. Is that wrong?"

"You bet your soul it's wrong, Justine!" cried Peter. "I know the modern attitude as well as you do, and it's the latest stand of the devil, and the worst! Give me a healthy prejudice, and I'll trust to overcome it in an honest soul, but this all-things-equal, going-the-same-way stuff—Justine, you're too honest, too intelligent, to think that's a substitute for a great, definite faith, for which a man gladly dies, and—what is far harder—lives by, through years of misery and temptation."

"Why, Peter! Why, Peter Cassett! It is a vital thing to you! You are actually short-breathed talking of it! I supposed you adhered to the Roman Catholic Church because you're a loyal boy, Peter, and you were born in it. But you think it matters! You are sickened at the thought that the Italians may be turned from it!" Justine cried. Hearing a sound preliminary to speech from her mother, she turned to her. "Please, mother, do not interrupt Peter and me," she said, and her mother was silent.

"Matter, Justine! Vital to me! Why, girl alive, how pitiful you are! It's the one thing that does matter! Can't you imagine what it means to a man to be *sure* of a reason for all this mystery of life? I'd go mad without it. What's more, I'd go bad. It's the faith, and the sacraments that hold you on your track. Of course, we aren't all striving for the same place! What nonsense! Ask a man point blank if he wanted to be damned he'd likely say no, but if he at once added that no man could be damned his 'no' wouldn't have the value my 'no' had. Be-

cause I know I can be damned, and I'll have to be most terribly careful or I shall be! Lots of human beings don't aim at any eternal end, Justine; they stroll along through life. Heaven is to be earned, not happened upon! A girl of your sort, and not to feel that truth, truth as an intrinsic thing, just for its own sake, is not worth any sacrifice to possess!" Peter looked at Justine with pity in his eyes as he paused, fearing he had wearied her.

But Justine's interest equaled his.

"What is truth?" she said sadly.

"Pontius Pilate asked that, in the same words, and then he washed his hands and gave over Our Lord to be crucified, Justine," said Peter softly.

The girl did not answer. Tears sprang into her eyes, and her strong mouth trembled.

"Ah, Him! I never can get away from Him, from that dominating Figure over the world," she whispered, but Peter caught her words.

He leaned forward, his hands clasped, hanging between his knees, his face thrust toward hers, its expression wonderfully sweet and winning. He smiled at her, and seeing Peter Cassett thus, one would have understood why it was that those who knew him said that there was something in him which no one could resist when he chose to use the gift of his charm.

"Dear old playmate, of course you can't! I shall like you to read that wonderful poem called *The Hound of Heaven*," Peter said. "And give me your promise, Justine: Spare those little children whom Our Lord loves; don't rob them of their faith. You can't make a Protestant out of a Latin; he is too logical to take a religion without authority, too truly of the



race of the saints to flourish bereft of his sacraments. You will only take all faith from those people, if you succeed in doing anything. You wanted to ask me to run for you; I ask you, Justine, to stand still for me. I beg of you not to pull down where you can never build up."

"Peter, I have thought of that!" cried Justine. "You have said precisely what would most persuade me to do as you ask. I am so destitute myself, the lack of definite faith is so horrible, yet the impossibility of having faith without—what made you say that about authority? I've long seen that mere opinions have no value. But how can there be authority? Peter, I promise you that I will do my best to check all attempts to steal your Italians from your Church, at least till I have seen farther. I will do as you ask, because you ask it, for our old days' sake, and because I am an ignorant girl, groping in the dark. But, Peter, Peter, are all Catholics like this? I had no dimmest expectation of a talk like this! Do you all believe so firmly? Is faith so vital, so real to you all? Do you all hold it higher than life?"

"We are not all what we should be, Justine—any more than your old Peter chum is," said Peter. "Can't you see how easily faith can be overlaid by sin, self-indulgence, all sorts of human weakness? But, yes; thank God, I do believe that in even the worst of us faith lives, and would be maintained at a cost, if the test came," said Peter.

"How strange! How wonderful!" murmured Justine. "Some day I shall learn more of your faith, Peter. It is—it interests me."

"Don't let it interest you too much," Mrs.

Coburn's rasping voice broke in. "This sort of talk is in very bad taste, and we've had quite enough of it. Your father would be very much annoyed, Justine. If you are going past Hibbard's drug store, Mr. Cassett, tell him to send me up a bottle of valerian; I sleep wretchedly."

"All right, Mrs. Coburn!" Peter laughed good-naturedly, with a reassuring glance at Justine, who blushed with mortification.

"I am going right along now, and past the drug store. I'll have him send it up. Good-bye, Justine. It is good to see you again. I hope it won't be long before we meet. And, indeed, I thank you for your patience with me, and for your promise. When next you see me I shall be running like an Arabian steed. Good-bye!"

## CHAPTER V

*"Strive Mightily, but Eat and Drink as Friends."*

GILES was waiting for Peter in his sitting room when Peter returned; Canis Major, who imitated his master in taking Giles for his best friend, lay with his head on Giles' knee, watching the door. He thought that if Giles were there, Peter must soon return, but, like a true dog, for him the presence of someone whom he liked marked the absence of the person whom he loved, making him wistful.

"Well, about time you turned up!" Peter hailed Giles as he threw open the door, and Canis bounded to him, whining joyously. "How long is it? Two or three days since I saw you!"

"Well, one day father had me go with him to look at a house which he was considering as an investment, to rent. I hear you've entered for the games as our champion," said Giles, a slight uneasiness in his manner.

"Who told you? Only this morning I turned in my name; Father Coigne asked me to," Peter answered.

"It was he who told me. I met him on his way over to the slums, said he had a bad case over there to straighten up, and then he told me he had snatched you from the deadly sin of sloth; had got you to run for St. John's." Giles laughed.

"Great little big man!" Peter exclaimed affectionately. "Say, Giles, I met Justin Coburn. He spoke to me about taking you on, said he'd been consider-

ing it, but he'd learned that you honed for architecture, and he thought an artist was not material for a business man, asked me if I agreed? I had to say I thought you weren't keen for business, so I suspect that isn't going through. I wanted to tell you about it as soon as I saw you, didn't want you to think I'd been maligning you behind your back, especially as he suggested a chance of offering me a berth in his place! What do you know about that! Justin Coburn! But more especially Coburn's partners!"

"I know enough about that to know it would be a mighty good thing if it happened!" Giles warmly approved. "You'd be an asset to that concern, if they had enough sense to see it. Coburn evidently has. They say the main factor in his success is an unerring perception of the best man, and the best place to put the best man. I'm glad and thankful if Mr. Coburn doesn't give me a chance with him; I couldn't turn it down; father would take it hard if I did, but since this has been hanging over me I've been positively curdled! There's no doubt that I'm honing for architecture, as you say. Mr. Chatillon has a fine library of architectural books; he thinks I am warranted in setting up as an architect, and he's a judge of my equipment. I've been telling him some of my ideas, drawing for him, and he thinks I've had a remarkable training. There's no doubt of that; I got what few men get. As though I'd ever suspect you of a trick, Hermit! I've just got around to what you said! Peter, say! Look here, I've something to tell you and it isn't easy!" Giles turned crimson and stammered.

"Oh!" exclaimed Peter involuntarily, catching his breath. He stooped to pat Canis Major and his

fingers tightened on the dog's hair till he uttered a slight yelp, and looked up over the top of his head at his master with reproachful inquiry. Then Peter straightened himself, looked into Giles' eyes and smiled at him.

"Don't be scared, Monk," he said. "We're all of us vain of our insight. You're going to tell me that I was right. Of course I was right! Can't I see? Isabelle—she loves you?"

"Pete, I do believe she does!" cried Giles, relieved that the plunge was made.

"Surest thing you know! Did you ask her? Or don't you want—don't tell me what happened, Giles! These things are sacred, even between such friends as we are." Peter put out his hand as if to ward off the answer to his question.

"Indeed I did not ask her—" Giles began, but Peter interrupted him.

"It would be all right; we agreed to that," he cried.

"Maybe, as far as straight dealing with you," Giles admitted. "But I talked to my father, and he said a young man had no right to tie a girl up till he had at least started in life. I'd like to tell you what happened, Peter, but I can't! I didn't mean to speak, nor move; father and I settled that I could not. My father is all right, Hermit! But—well, I can't tell you; I don't know myself! I sort of looked at Isabelle and I knew everything that I didn't mean should escape was in my face. And she saw it, and her eyes answered it. That's the whole story, Hermit; there wasn't a word spoken; not then nor afterward. I came away in a few minutes. But Isabelle knows that I love her, and I know that she loves me, and we both know that the other knows. Peter, as

God is my judge, I'm sorry, even while I'm drunk with joy! Nothing is settled; not a word is spoken. It may be you after all, and this is only a young girl's fancy."

For a moment Peter was silent. The two young men who loved each other more than any other human thing, in spite of the true love for the sweet girl whom they both loved, stared into each other's eyes, pain in the blue and the brown ones. Then Peter put out his hands and the smile that came over his face was beautifully sweet, with a tenderness that was beyond his years.

"Dear old chap, do you suppose I'm not honestly glad?" he said softly. "I swear I am. Don't talk irreverent nonsense; don't think it. It is not a passing fancy. We wouldn't want, either of us, to think of her as fickle, trifling. It's not fair to her, to our love for her. Congratulations, Giles, and for her at least as much as for you; a lucky girl and a wise one! I'll be all right. I'm glad; honest I am! I may go away for a while, but don't you worry over that. I need a change; I'm a restless fellow. I've a mind to go on a walking tour of California, or the Continent, or—anywhere." In spite of himself Peter's voice betrayed his pain. He heard it, and again stooped to pat Canis Major. "Sure you'd go, too, my dog!" he said in his usual tone. "Don't you see I'd tramp, partly because I so dearly love to swing my long legs, but mostly so I could keep you with me? Canis would pine to death if I left him," he added, looking over to Giles to invite him to echo his laugh. "Dandy good news, Monk, but not news to me after all! We'd better have lunch. It's time for it, and past that. I'll look it up. Then I'll tell you

about my call on Justine Coburn while we eat. Monk, she's a great girl! I admire her tremendously; I don't understand why I see so little of her; I'm going to see more of her. She's a great girl, I tell you, lots of character, and brains enough to set up two. I'll tell you all about it at lunch. Wait till I find out when Mrs. Riordan means to feed us, and with what.

Peter hurried out of the room with a loud laugh, and Giles dropped his face into his hands. Peter would play up; Peter was game, but to have been the one to shoot his arrow o'er the house and hurt his brother!

In the meantime Justine Coburn had spent a long time in her own chamber, looking out of the window, with her vision wholly turned inward, thinking hard, feeling keenly.

"There is but one Peter Cassett," she said aloud, moving at last and surprised to find her muscles stiff from long sitting. "There is no one his equal."

She put on her walking skirt and coat—Justine was always strictly tailor-made in her street habiliments, set upon her hair her close little hat with its one stiff ornament on its side—Justine renounced feathers and furs, personal adornment which had cost life—and went down the stairs.

"Going out, Justie?" her mother's thin voice called from her room across the wide hall. "Why don't you have the car take you?"

"Rather walk, thanks, mother," said Justine. "I'm going to see Isabelle Chatillon; we are on the committee for the supper after the sports on Tuesday."

"Well," said her mother, admitting grudgingly that she had nothing to put forward for which to

claim Justine's afternoon. She was one of those selfish women who consider claiming their daughter's time, their best years of life, proof that they are superior in their love for their children.

"I wish you'd go to Haniman's and see if he has any decent grapefruit; those he sent last are dreadfully bitter, and my appetite is so poor that I must have the best of everything to tempt it. I wish you'd have the car around; it's so foolish to walk. It isn't as though you had to walk, but with your father—"

Justine continued her way down the stairs, calling back:

"All right, mother; I'll see what Haniman has."

Isabelle welcomed Justine fervently. She was glowing with loveliness, so beautiful, with a subtle new charm, that Justine stared at her.

"Oh, it's no wonder! Poor Peter!" she thought, stabbed with what she imagined was pure pity for Peter; Justine's keen eyes had long ago seen the facts of his, Giles' and Isabelle's secrets.

"Justine, you don't know how glad I am to see you!" cried Isabelle. "I wish we were together as we were when we were children! But we are separated."

"I suppose we are, Isa," said Justine slowly. "But you don't come to see me. There's no reason for separation. I've made up my mind to end it; let's try to get together. I'm a lonely girl, Isa, though I am up to my neck in all sorts of things. I want to talk about the supper to-day, however," she added, as if to get away from personalities.

The two girls discussed the supper arrangements at length, satisfactorily, for Justine, when all was settled, said:



"You're a sensible little person, Isabelle Chatillon! You see what I mean; the majority of the girls bother me, get in my way. You're far too pretty to be sensible, but you are ever so sensible!"

"Well, Justine!" laughed Isabelle. "I'm only just pretty enough to be sensible, if sense lies in looks."

"Does that mean anything, Isa? It sounds as if it meant something, but I don't get it—like 'Alice in Wonderland!' Look here, Isabelle, I had a long talk with your Peter Cassett this morning—"

"He's not my Peter Cassett, but isn't he fine?" Isabelle interrupted Justine.

"He's so fine that it proves you're not sensible, after all, if he isn't your Peter Cassett!" declared Justine. "Giles is a dear, a nice boy, but this great Peter—"

"Father Coigne calls him Peter the Great," cried Isabelle.

"Good for the priest!" said Justine. "What do you think I've done for this Peter? I've promised to keep my hands off the poor Italians till I've looked into what he said about it. He said I was undermining their faith—we Presbyterians with money to bribe them—that's what it comes to! And that I had nothing to give in the place of the Roman Catholic Church. And he went on to say—with such unmistakable earnestness that a blind man would see that he meant it supremely—that faith, definite, dogmatic faith, was beyond all other good! He said we moderns were talking nonsense when we said all ways to heaven were equally good; he said what it came to was that we didn't vitally believe anything. And, Isabelle, of course we do not. But I've thought that morality, philanthropy, ethics in gen-

eral, were better than dogma. Peter seems to think that even these lower values won't last unless there is a defined, organized system of faith behind them. He spoke of 'an authority.' He is a big, jolly, alive young man, but he *believes!* He believes as a mediaeval monk might, and he thinks it matters supremely to discover the one truth—one, single, revealed truth, Isabelle!" Justine spread out her hands, then clasped them and waited.

Isabelle looked at her, wondering.

"But, Justine, dear, of course it matters! Nothing else matters by comparison. Does that strike you as strange?" she said.

"You, too? A young, pretty thing like you? Do you feel as Peter does?" cried Justine. "Are 'all Catholics like this?"

Isabelle laughed. "Why, Justine, I'm nearly as old as you are, within less than two years! Why should I not feel as Peter does? Yes, all Catholics feel this. We should not be Catholics otherwise. That is what it is to be a Catholic; it is to have a religion, not an opinion," she said.

"Yes, we do have opinions. Nobody would die for an opinion; it demands a conviction. You said a wise thing then, Isabelle," said Justine slowly. "It strikes me as singular, incomprehensible, to find a young man like Peter feeling as he does. I thought he was a Catholic much as he was a Cassett, born so. But it's more, far more."

"Dear me, yes, Justine!" cried Isabelle. "It is a passionate devotion to what we all come to realize for ourselves, having first been taught it on supreme authority."

"You talk exactly alike, like Peter!" cried Justine.

Isabelle hesitated, then she said:

"Justine, what would you think if I told you that Peter Cassett is one of a band of men for Perpetual Adoration, that every Thursday night he spends two hours or more in the church in adoration?"

"In adoration?" echoed Justine groping, wondering. "Of God? Or your saints? Why does he, Isabelle?"

"Of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament," said Isabelle in a low voice. "In reparation."

"Ah, I know what you believe of the Eucharist! How can you?" cried Justine. "What is the reparation for?"

"Reparation for Our Lord's sufferings in His Passion, for all the insults and neglect we have heaped upon Him ever since," replied Isabelle.

"Our Lord? Christ?" repeated Justine, trying the sound of the other form, more familiar to her, of allusion to the Incarnate God. "You speak as if it had lately happened. Christ died two thousand years ago."

"For us," added Isabelle, "He died that we might live. The debt is not outlawed. Yet we all wrong Him now."

"And Peter spends hours each week, in the night, trying to make up for this?" cried Justine. "Oh, I thought the Knights of the Holy Grail were all past and gone! Isabelle, I like to read the mediaeval legends, but we are talking of our boy playmate, that big, athletic, merry Peter Cassett, and this is the twentieth century!"

"Time is not counted in the annals of eternity, Justine, and the Church is part and revelation of God eternal. Peter, and St. Dominic and St. Fran-

cis, the martyrs in the catacombs, are all contemporaries in a real sense, and Peter, our comrade, follows Peter who followed Our Lord," said Isabelle, her beauty glowing with her ardor.

"Come to see me, Isabelle," said Justine, rising abruptly. "You speak just as Peter spoke. How, how can you help loving Peter?"

"I do love him," cried Isabelle.

"Ah, but not enough, not as he loves you! Is Giles, also, like this?" Justine said.

"Giles is not like Peter, but he is as good as Peter is, and he would answer you as we do, if that is what you mean," said Isabelle, but she looked startled.

"Peter does not love me, Justine! Not—not more than I love him."

"Oh, you little foolish creature, he loves you as only Peter can love! If I were you I would give myself to be cut into fragments, if by doing so I could serve Peter Cassett, make him happy!" cried Justine, and suddenly went out of the door, down the walk without looking back at Isabelle.

There were not many days following Peter's enrollment for the Woodcock Marathon before that event took place.

Peter had kept himself in condition in a gymnasium and by a run every morning before breakfast. It required for him but a test of the track, and the course of the five mile run to make him ready to take part among the contestants.

He had not seen Isabelle since Giles had told him of their silent revelation to each other of their love, and Peter availed himself of the plea of practise for the sports to avoid Giles. He did not allow himself to dwell upon the pain which made his heart so

heavy within him that he fantastically wondered whether he were able to race, carrying its dead weight.

Father Coigne, to whom he betook himself for help, albeit not directly spoken to of his need, held him up with an appeal to his obligations. He approved Peter's plan to go on a long pedestrian tour of whatever country, or section of the country, attracted Peter.

"Go tramping, my son, you and Canis Major," he said. "There's nothing like a man's feet and legs for clearing his brain, and cheering his heart. Go tramping, and my blessing go with you! I wish I could go with you, instead. But I am held fast, and must be one more here to welcome you back—and not the one least glad to see you, Peter the Great!"

"If you could go with me, Father, I would start with anticipation, instead of endurance of the trip, as the least of evils," said Peter.

"Nonsense, Peter! Such a trip is no evil, however you take it!" maintained Father Coigne stoutly. "Now see here! It's not a matter of conversions, nor saintly example, that you should win this race for me, my son, I grant you that! But I don't want my champion coming in second; keep that well in your mind! Don't you let your private troubles be a trouble to me, but do your prettiest with those long, strong legs of yours and put it all over the rest of them! Hear me?"

"Yes, Father," answered Peter, and resolved to win the race.

No better medicine could have been given Peter to sustain him in the first days of knowledge that Isabelle was lost to him, and this Father Gregory

Coigne knew perfectly well.

So Peter did his best. The day was fine, an autumnal tang in the air, yet the sunshine brilliant. A crowd gathered to see the sports; the gate money insured the poor of Woodcock coal and food for the winter.

Justine developed a sore throat and was kept at home, but Isabelle was at her post, making the tables pretty, setting forth the abundant viands which had been contributed by all Woodcock for the supper following the games.

Peter knew that Isabelle could not watch him down the track in the shorter race, nor see him start on the five mile run. It was a relief, and yet he was sorry that her eyes were not to be upon him. He knew that Isabelle would have been saying Hail Marys for him—but perhaps she would be as it was, for Isabelle was fond of him.

Splendid in his physical perfection, stripped down to his running tights, Peter Cassett, the champion from St. John's Church, shot out and around the track.

Giles ran on the outside after him, pushing his way through the crowd, cheering, shouting: "Pete! Old Man! Hermit!" till he was hoarse, knowing that Peter heard, and was heartened by him, as he had so often been at college.

Peter won hands down, far outdistancing his competitors. There was not another such magnificent, strong, fleet body among the young men of Woodcock, and Peter's manner of life preserved him what God had made him.

The five miles' running race was Peter's also; he had endurance, as well as speed. His was the high-

est, the longest jump; running jumps, standing jumps, hurdling, Peter Cassett won them all. It was his day of triumph. The crowd cheered him till it could cheer no more. "Peter Cassett! Pete Cassett! Peter!" shouted the jubilant Woodcock boys, and Peter gladly, for Father Gregory Coigne's sake, heard: "St. John's! St. John's!" shouted by many voices.

Peter rejoiced that he had, as Father Coigne had bade him, "put it all over the rest of them." He was glad that he had won; he was glad and thankful for his splendid strength, his magnificent muscles; he rejoiced in the strength of his arms, the clean-cut, flexible strength of his legs.

At the supper Isabelle waited upon him as Peter sat receiving congratulations, and he was able to meet her affectionate words, her glad looks, her proud congratulations without wincing, even with pleasure in them.

This was Peter Cassett's day, Peter, her beloved playmate, and Peter was glad that Isabelle was proud of him, sharing his triumph as partly hers.

Giles hovered near Peter, forgetting Isabelle for the moment. This was Peter, his own old Peter, Peter "the Hermit"! There was no one like him; Giles offered him the devotion of his life-long sense that in all the world there was none like his Peter.

Speeches followed. Woodcock people congratulated themselves and one another that they were Woodcockians, Americans, charitable, talented, showing to all the admiring world what the genus man can become if he will only follow the standards set up in such favored places as Woodcock, the quintessence of the superiority of the Western

republic.

But with all this there was time and space for congratulation of those who had taken part in the sports, the winners in the various contests, not least, but most of all of Peter Cassett, who had won the hardest, the most spectacular victories. The more tolerant, the wide-minded—Justin Coburn among them—spoke a few condescending kind words of the priest whose champion Peter Cassett was, who had served Woodcock well in keeping to their duty the ignorant foreign element which, without his control, might have been a menace to the community.

The sun was sinking in a blaze of glory when the last word was spoken, the last toast drunk—in grape juice—and the "Star Spangled Banner" was sung standing. With his arm over Giles' shoulders, Giles' arm over his, Peter Cassett left the stadium, as Woodcock called it. His day was over, his sun setting in a blaze of glory.



## CHAPTER VI

### *"Taking the Measure of an Unmade Grave."*

**"DO YOU** mind going down to the station, Hermit?" asked Giles. "Father ordered new shoes for the car, sent by freight, and I forgot to ask if they'd come when I was down this morning; I promised him I would. It won't take us long to make a loop to the station, then go home."

"Not a bit," agreed Peter. "I'm heated up, still, and I'd just as lief get cool before we go to your house. Sure your mother and the girls expect me?"

"Sure, it was they made me promise to bring you home with me, and not to fail! It wasn't my idea. The girls want to look you over at short range, to see how you look as a hero, I suppose," Giles assured him. "Say, Petey-boy, this is glory!"

The small boys who had watched the sports were following the friends down the street, numerically strong, enthusiastically stronger.

"That's him! That's Peter Cassett!" Giles and Peter heard one or another of them say repeatedly, unnecessarily, for they all knew it. "The big one's him. Say, he didn't do a thing to 'em! Say, ain't he the athletics! Say, he run fer de priest." The last in an accent that made sympathy with Peter's enrollment beyond question.

"Mighty nice of you to let me walk with you, Mr. Cassett!" observed Giles. "I feel like a Gallic captive in the Roman emperor's triumph!"

"Well, I feel like a fool!" Peter retorted. "Of

course, boys don't really matter, but still I do feel like a fool! I've got the idea, Giles! Let's invite the whole mad bunch into Hibbard's and set them up to ice cream! They'll appreciate the attention, and while they're licking their spoons we can break away from this admiring train. I hate to parade the town like a drum major at the head of a brass band, without a drum major's hat to hide my blushes."

"A-amen!" Giles chanted, and Peter faced his admirers.

"Say, boys, what do you say to coming into Hibbard's and let me stand you an ice cream all around? We ought to celebrate, you know," he called to them.

"Whatjer know 'bout dat!" cried the boy who had said that Peter "had run fer de priest." "Whole bunch 'f us?"

"Every one of you, ice cream on me!" cried Peter, and led the way into the drug store.

He instructed the youthful white-coated clerk at the soda fountain to serve the boys—a count rounded up twenty-nine of them—with the ice cream of their choice, charged to Peter's account, and then he and Giles slipped away, leaving the lads rapturously giving orders and enshrining Peter Cassett in their hearts as not merely an athlete, a hero, but a model gentleman, whose heart was in the right place, understanding theirs—and we know where boys' hearts are said to be enthroned.

"Doesn't take much to make kids happy, does it?" said Peter. "It pays to invest in their pleasure. Boys are grateful cubs; they don't forget treats. 'The shouting and the tumult dies,' Giles. What next?"

"Well, Hermit, old man, what next? I've been wondering, but I don't think we'd better start anything serious to-day—talk, I mean," said Giles. "This is a day of jubilee. The shouting may die, but the value of it stands—

"Still stands Thy ancient sacrifice,  
A broken and a contrite heart,"

are the next lines. You don't mean that, Monk?"

"No, no, no!" cried Giles. "I mean, you've got your place in Woodcock, and it isn't for your athletics, either!"

"I'm going off on a long walking tour. Then I'm going to take up something worth while and put it through," said Peter.

"Hermit, do you honestly think that you must go on that trip? Won't you—I mean, can't you go into something here in Woodcock right off, and—and—see it out? Maybe things aren't going as it seems—"

"I am going as I seem to be going, Monk," Peter interrupted Giles. "See that man down the platform there? He isn't going as he seems to be going!"

They had reached the Woodcock railway station and Giles looked down its long platform in the direction toward which Peter nodded.

"Wherever he got it, he got it all right, didn't he?" Giles agreed. "He has on a beautiful high polish. Very likely it is a turpentine polish; in these days they don't get rubbed down with pure alcohol, often. If he wavers around on the edge of the platform when a train goes through it's likely to disagree with him."

"No train due for some time," said Peter, looking at his watch. "If there were, we'd have to swing him over to the other side. Poor fellow; his clothes look as though he'd invested more in his inner man than on his outer man for a long while past. He's a derelict, fast enough. Giles, what a sunset that is! Are you seeing those colors? You know, there's something about a sunset like that, a skyful of glory, that makes you feel as though nothing in all the world mattered, sickness, health, joy, sorrow, anything but—the glory!"

Peter swung around on his heel and faced the glowing sky, magnificent in piled-up clouds of flaming crimson, melting into violet shades, while below them, on the edge of the horizon, rested a broad band of pure, translucent gold, clear, brilliant, suggestive of the tone of a bell made visible instead of audible.

"Great, Peter!" said Giles softly.

The two young men stood for a moment silently watching the sunset, which seemed to reveal to them faintly the ineffable beauty of what lies beyond the world, beyond life.

Then Giles turned away.

"They'll close up the freight house if I don't look out. Stay here while I go in, Peter; I won't be a moment, and we'll have that sky before us on our way home," he said.

Peter remained standing where Giles left him, but only for an instant. The gyrations of the wretched derelict whom they had noticed as they came down the platform caught his eye. The man, miserable, sodden, degraded, horribly contrasting with the glory in the heavens and with the strong, clean young

manhood of Peter's splendid body, had come lurching up nearer to Peter, and was wavering from side to side, as if he were about to fall.

"Don't care a whole lot about arresting these people, but I believe it would be kindness to call a cop and have him run in. He's not safe," thought Peter. "No train coming now, though."

Again he looked at his watch, and turned with a sudden resolve to consult the stationmaster on the case.

Then, though Peter was right and no train was due, a locomotive on its way down to help the heavy passenger train which was due in a half hour, up a steep mountain grade ten miles below, whistled around the curve, and swiftly rounded it, speeding down the track.

The drunkard with one of the impulses of the insane and drunk, was impelled at that moment to cross the track. Lurching, swinging, staggering, he stepped out to the rail, the locomotive rushing upon him.

Peter sprang to catch him. There was plenty of time for one with Peter's quickness of motion, with his co-ordinated muscles, to save the man, though the locomotive was almost on him. But the heel of Peter's shoe caught in some way upon the rivet of the track-joining. It threw him down. The drunkard made a crazy leap, and sprawled on the other side of the track, free of the locomotive. But the great engine passed over Peter, crushing him as he lay.

A shout of horror brought Giles running from the freight house. Men seemed to leap from all sides and rush to Peter. They lifted him. Giles

turned away his face; he could not look. Peter's blood was streaming from his body as they lifted him; it lay in a pool where he had fallen.

"He's dead," Giles said hoarsely, a great sob and a shudder tearing his body.

"He's not dead," said the stationmaster. "I feel his heart beating. Call the ambulance—hurry call. Get Father Coigne, somebody. God help him, he'd better be dead. His legs are crushed beyond calling 'em legs."

A boy who had pleaded in vain his ability to drive his father's Ford car, and had not been allowed to try because of his fourteen years, saw his opportunity. The car stood on the other side of the station. The boy jumped into it, pushed down the pedal, swung the car around in the station square, and drove it madly down the street, and triumphantly stopped it before the priest's door. He leaped out of the car and ran stumbling breathlessly into the house.

Father Coigne was reading his breviary, his office belated by the games. He shut the book and arose, knowing that some catastrophe had befallen one of his people.

"Father Cassett, come quick! Peter Coigne's hurt. He's killed by an engine on the track! Hurry, Father Cassett, or he'll be dead for keeps," the boy cried.

"Peter Coigne? Peter Cassett? Oh, not Peter!" cried the priest.

But as he spoke he had pulled apart the buttons and buttonholes of his cassock, and was on his way to the sacristy of the church next door for the oils of Extreme Unction, and the Viaticum.

When he returned the priest was white to his lips.

"Can you take me to him?" he asked.

"Sure can I!" the boy vaunted. "I tole him I could drive the thing this good while. They was gettin' the amberlance. Had I better get right over to the hospital?"

"Yes, I think so," said Father Coigne.

The jarring, rattling old Ford car drew up at the hospital door just as the ambulance arrived from the other direction. Father Coigne saw the three men in their white uniforms who had come with it, the surgeon and two others, lift the stretcher, and two of them carried it up the hospital entrance. Giles descended from the ambulance, helped by the arm of one of the orderlies supporting him. He looked as if he, almost as much as Peter, needed assistance.

The great surgeon who had been summoned to be ready to receive Peter, and to do for him anything that might be done, met the priest in the hall while the dreadful procession went toward the elevator, wheeling the stretcher on its wagon, to take Peter to the operating room.

The surgeon greatly admired, revered would be the better word, the slender priest whom he often met in their various work upon a tragedy.

"Ah, Father Coigne!" he said offering the priest his hand. "This is hard on you, but it will be hard on lots of people; Peter Cassett is well-liked, and to-day he is the town's hero. Let me go over him first, Father, to see what his condition is. Then I'll have you called before I operate, if there's anything I can do."

"I'll wait in there," said Father Coigne, indicat-

ing a small reception room on the ground floor of the hospital. "Giles, dear boy, come with me."

Father Coigne and Giles waited in complete silence. It seemed to them a long time; in reality it was not long.

Doctor Cleveland himself returned to Father Coigne.

"I have to get on my uniform; I thought you'd like to see me first, to have from my own lips my report on Peter Cassett," he said. "I do not think he is injured in any way above the belt; not above the knees. I see no reason why he should not live. The shock is pretty bad, but he is young and strong, and has never dissipated his splendid health. But I'm not sure that I wouldn't rather tell you he was to die. Both his legs are crushed just below the knees. I am going to amputate in a quarter of an hour. There's always the uncertainty of ether, and he's lost considerable blood. If you want to give him the sacraments before I operate, go right up, Father; they're getting Peter ready for me, but they'll yield place to you, of course."

"Yes; I must anoint him, give him all the sacraments. Is he conscious? But he went to confession Saturday," Father Coigne spoke with difficulty.

"He wasn't conscious, but I think he will be, to a degree, when you get there," said the surgeon, who believed that death ended everything, for a man as for a dog, or said that he did, and yet who never failed to further Father Coigne's ministrations to a patient, and who looked wistfully at the priest whenever they met.

"Better not go up, my poor Giles," said Father Coigne.



"Dear me, no; he can't go up," said Doctor Cleveland briskly. "I'll go to scrub up and put on my togs. You won't be long, Father?"

"No; not long," assented Father Coigne.

An orderly met Father Coigne in the upper hall and took him to Peter. He lay with a sheet over him as the surgeon had left him after going over his body to find out his injuries. Peter opened his eyes and looked into the priest's face, partly conscious, but confused. Already his eyes looked sunken, their blueness black.

"Something happened, Father," murmured Peter.

"Yes, dear lad; you were run over. I have brought you the holy oils, and your Lord," said Father Coigne.

"Me? Peter? Seems—queer," he said. "Die?"

"No, Peter, I think not, but best be ready. Have you anything on your conscience to confess?" said Father Coigne.

"Not that I know—it's not long enough—" Poor Peter tried to smile.

"I'll say the Act of Contrition for you; try to follow it. Then I'll give you absolution, and then anoint you, and give you Our Lord, Peter dear," Father Coigne spoke tremulously.

"It's—I saw sunset. I'm not fasting," said Peter.

"No, Peter; it's as the Viaticum," whispered the priest.

Peter's eyes opened wide with a start. "For Peter Cassett? How strange!" he said, almost vigorously. "But, oh, Father, I don't mind!"

The priest administered the sacraments. After Peter had received the Viaticum, Father Coigne saw his lips move in prayer while an expression of pro-

found peace, and a half smile rested upon his face.

But when the Catholic nurse who came to serve the priest turned back the sheet from the feet, and Father Coigne caught sight of the crushed legs, for an instant the priest recoiled in horror. This was Peter, Peter his champion, the victor in the races but a few short hours before!

"Do you think I'm to die, Father?" Peter asked, fully conscious. "Something is so strange; I can't move—"

"Peter, dear lad of mine, I must tell you; you should know. I do not think that you will die, but they will—you will be lame, Peter!" Father Coigne turned coward at the word. He could not tell poor Peter the worst.

Peter was silent; he closed his eyes and did not answer. The attendants came in, and told Father Coigne that Doctor Cleveland was ready.

"May God bless you, dear boy," said Father Coigne, and laid his hands on Peter's brow.

"He has," said Peter.

Then Father Coigne left him to the surgeon's hands.

Father Coigne stopped at the small reception room where he had left Giles. He found him exactly where he had left him, huddled up, his arms folded on his breast, bent over, staring at the floor.

"Giles, come home with me. I sent for a taxi, and I'm going to take you home. There is nothing more for us here to-night. The hospital will call us to tell us how Peter comes out of the ether, and that is all that we can have for comfort till to-morrow. He was conscious; he knew that he received the sacraments," said Father Coigne. "Come with

me, Giles, poor lad! It is harder for you now than for Peter."

"Didn't he send me any word?" asked Giles.

"He had received Holy Communion, Giles; you know our Peter. He will send you his messages in the morning. Giles, you are the only one that can do something for him that Peter would want done above all. Go and get Canis Major, and comfort him; it would torture Peter to know his dog pined for him," Father Coigne had an inspiration to say. The expression of Giles' eyes frightened him; he knew that if he could find something to give Giles to do for Peter there was hope of tiding Giles over this first incredulous agony.

"That's true, Father. Peter would want me to look after Canis. I'll take him to walk. But first may I go home, please?" said Giles, like a child.

Father Coigne took Giles with him to his home, and went in with him to help him tell the dreadful story, and to steady the Guernseys, who also loved Peter, that they might sustain poor Giles.

"Well, Father Coigne, the most welcome of beings! We were wondering and wondering—"

"Where's Peter, Giles?" cried Mrs. Guernsey sharply, seeing Giles' stricken face.

Without answering, Giles dropped on his knees beside his mother, buried his face in her shoulder and sobbed aloud. Father Coigne told in a few words what had happened.

"The end of his day of victory!" said Mrs. Guernsey almost inaudibly. "Giles, dear, dear Giles, it is worse than death to think of our great Peter crippled like this. But bear up, dear lad; be sure God Almighty is not done with Peter because he is bereft

of any, or all, of his limbs."

"Will you take Mary to stay with Isabelle? Isabelle will be heart-broken," said Giles. "Mary, go to Isabelle. Tell her I couldn't possibly see her. Comfort her, if you can, Mary. Father, could you take Mary to Isabelle Chatillon? She'll need her. I'll go to Peter's house. Tell Isabelle I'll see her when I can; I couldn't see her now." Giles arose to his feet and looked around helplessly for his hat.

"Surely I'll take her there! Mary Guernsey is a sort of Sister of Mercy to all of us," said Father Coigne, looking with admiration at quiet Mary Guernsey's pitying face, as, forgetful of her own shock, she tried to console her two sisters clinging to her. "The news will be all over town in no time. I will return here later on, after the hospital has telephoned us the first report from Peter. You are right, Giles. Isabelle will need help to bear these tidings."

Mary went away with the priest without delaying him longer than it took to wrap a cape around her; Mary never delayed anyone for anything for herself.

But in all the sympathetic help which these people who loved Peter and one another, mutually gave out in this first facing of the thought of amputation for Peter, the loss of his legs which was worse to think of for him than death—yet death, too, might await him—it never occurred to anyone that Justine Coburn might need comforting.

Mr. Coburn came home that night late. He had heard the story of the accident among the first to hear of it; he had gone in his car down to the station on business connected with the Marathon, and found it the one subject on everybody's lips. He drove

home and found his wife alone in her sitting room. He began at once to tell her what had happened.

"Look out, Justin; don't speak so loud. Justine may hear you," Mrs. Coburn warned.

"Justine? Well, why shouldn't she hear me? Why shouldn't Justine hear of an accident to Peter Cassett?" demanded her husband. "She is sure to hear of it."

"Tell her carefully," said his wife briefly.

"Why? I ask you why?" demanded Mr. Coburn angrily.

Mrs. Coburn looked at him, divided in her mind between a womanly instinct to defend another woman's secret, her own daughter's secret, and a wifely desire to stab her husband's assurance that he, not she, best understood their daughter, he, not Justine's mother, was nearest to her heart, had her confidence.

"Justie used to play with Peter Cassett a lot when they were children. She was very fond of him, and she is not a child that changes," the mother temporized.

"Well, they're amputating Peter Cassett's legs this moment probably, and why Justine should not hear that he is crippled by an accident, a futile sacrifice for a worthless man, I don't—"

Justine stood in the doorway, tall and thin, a tragic figure. She was wrapped in a wool gown that crossed around her and came up close about the throat, the sore throat which had kept her that day from seeing the games.

Her face was livid, and she pointed one long forefinger at her father as if she were accusing him of crime. For a moment she struggled to speak, and

could not. Then she said with difficulty, pulling at her throat with her left hand:

"Why—do—you—tell—such—such—a-story? It is not true!"

Mr. Coburn sprang to his feet, frightened.

"Yes, dear, it is true. Peter Cassett tried to pull a drunken man off the track. His foot caught. He fell and both his legs were crushed by a locomotive. The man took care of himself. Peter's legs are amputated—Justine, little girl, don't, don't be so sorry for him! It doesn't matter, except we're humanely sorry."

Justine pushed her father from her as he tried to take her in his arms.

"Matter!" she cried wildly. "Peter crippled! Peter! Oh, no, no, no! Oh, it's funny! He won all the races. I had them telephone the result. He won them all! And the same day, at night, they amputate his legs! Oh, it's funny! It's funny! Don't you see how funny it is? Why don't you laugh?" She broke into peals of hysterical laughter, and fell forward upon her face with a deep groan. "Oh, brave, splendid Peter, why didn't He kill you? Oh, Peter, Peter, where's your God Whom you adored at night, loving Him and trusting Him? Peter, Peter! I'd not have failed you so!"

Her father gathered her into his arms, now unresisting, and carried Justine to her room. He was horrified to learn that the wheels which had crippled Peter had passed over his girl's heart.

## CHAPTER VII

*"A Wretched Soul, Bruised with Adversity."*

**I**NDIFFERENT to all else, even the thought of Isabelle coming rarely to his mind, Giles Guernsey sat beside Peter lying upon his spotless bed in the white room of the hospital. He did not absent himself from his post during the day, except to give Peter's dog an airing and assure him that Peter would soon return. Giles felt certain that Canis Major understood, if not what he said, at least the spirit of it, that he thus kept Canis' heaviness of heart from becoming fatal. It was all that he could do for Peter now, to hold up the loving dog-heart so that it would not break from loneliness; to save Peter, when he should go home, from his own loneliness without his setter's devotion. This, and to sit beside him, was all that Giles could do for Peter; he knew that, though Peter rarely spoke during those oppressive first days after his injury, that Peter was conscious that Giles was beside him and was comforted by his presence.

On the second day Peter turned his eyes upon Giles. "Canis?" he asked.

"I feed him, Hermit; I've got him to eat, and I take him out twice every day. He's downcast, but he's going to pull through; I've told him you were, too," said Giles.

Peter closed his eyes. "Am I? Through what?" he murmured.

Later in the day Peter turned his eyes again on

Giles, and this time he moved his head slightly.

"The man?" he asked.

"He got over all right, never touched him," said Giles sharply. He was still unreconciled to that worthless creature's complete escape and that this misfortune had fallen upon Peter, pointlessly, since he had not had to save the man.

"That's good; you can't tell," whispered Peter, and fell asleep as he spoke.

"He's not doing well, is he, doctor?" Giles said to the interne whom he met in the hall as he stole away to get his lunch. "He lies for hours sleeping, hardly a word, or a look, though sometimes I see him staring at the ceiling, and he frowns a little as though he were puzzling over something. But he is so weak, so motionless, and he was so strong! He's not doing well, but you won't tell me?"

"On the contrary, he's doing exceedingly well," said the interne, somewhat impatiently. "His flesh is healing like a child's, he has no temperature worth mentioning. His system has undergone a great shock, and he's meeting it in the best possible way, not making any effort, not resisting, merely lying supine and letting nature have her chance. And she'll take it! I—Doctor Cleveland thinks Peter Cassett will come around in good shape. The more he sleeps, the longer he postpones acute realization of what has actually befallen him, the better for him. Let him sleep, poor chap! The fear for him is when he faces the fact that both his legs are gone from below the knees, how he'll take it. He may set up a fever then, you know!"

"No," said Giles. "He will not. I'd almost be willing to let him die in these long sleeps of his



rather than have that time come, but you doctors count on Peter Cassett's physical strength to pull him through, and I count on his soul's strength to pull him through the harder phase of his suffering."

"Hope you're right; you probably are. You know him," said the interne. "But I'll tell you straight, if I'd lost both legs I'd get a small cyanide pill from the case and I'd get out. I wouldn't face it! Good artificial legs or not; they can make what they please to patch us up, but I'd get out, if I were in Peter Cassett's shoes—no, by cracky, he hasn't any shoes! Well, I'd get out, that's certain!"

"If Peter lives he'll live all over, same as he always did, but without the same sort of proofs of it. Peter never will lie down on his job till he dies," said Giles.

"Not even if he can't stand up on it?" suggested the interne with a laugh. "I'm willing to admit that standing up *to* a thing, and standing up *on* a thing are not the same. I don't consider myself a coward, but cyanide for mine if I'm ever badly maimed! So if there's any Power that runs us, or takes an interest in us humans—and I don't believe there is; we're all the result of natural laws working out—then I give that Power due notice that if It wants me to stay put It's got to see to it that I'm not up against a handicap like Peter Cassett's!"

"If he doesn't die, it will be no handicap to Peter," declared Giles confidently, as he walked away. "You poor conceited little intellect you!" he thought, getting into the elevator for the ground floor. "Peter would say you had a bigger handicap than his is this minute, and he'd be right!"

It was on the fifth day that Giles, coming back to

Peter from his daily airing of grieving Canis Major, found the nurse out of the room. There was no need of her constant presence. Peter had not developed a fever; his wounds were healing by leaps and bounds, without the slightest sign of infection; his pulse and heart were steady; his appetite all that it should have been under his conditions.

He had not talked much to Giles, but he had asked a few questions and had listened to his replies; never a word that bordered on the accident, nor a reference to Isabelle.

Now Giles found him with his body thrown forward, curved on its side, and his bed clothes pulled back, his left hand busy with the bandages which bound all that was left of his long, strong legs.

Peter started when Giles opened the door and straightened himself like a child caught in a forbidden cupboard.

"Where's that nurse?" demanded Giles angrily, and came close to Peter's bed, with difficulty restraining himself from falling on his knees beside it and taking Peter in his arms to cover his wounds in heart and body, as a mother would have done.

"I begged her to hunt up the interne and ask him if I might have some ice cream, right away. I pretended I wanted it instantly. She is to send out for some, if the doctor says yes. She said she knew there couldn't be any objection to my having it, but I was strong on getting the doctor's permission. It isn't her fault, Giles; she knows I'm not in any sort of danger. I've been thinking since I have gathered up enough strength to think. At first I half wondered if I'd had a delirium and dreamed that table and the ether. And I wasn't perfectly sure when I

tried to move, because I couldn't judge when I was so bandaged. Well, Giles, old Monk, I wonder what's next?"

Peter waited for Giles' reply; it came slowly, with a supreme effort it came clearly. Giles was able to meet this dreaded moment as he knew Peter's friend should meet it.

"Next, Hermit, is complete recovery—that's first," he said. "You lost a lot of blood, and you had a big shock. But you're such a sound, strong fellow that there's no trouble about that. Then you'll be fitted with a pair of those splendid—" Giles stopped short; he could not say what he meant to say, could not speak to Peter of artificial legs. "They make wonderful things nowadays," he resumed. "They'll fix you up so that you won't be lame. You'll have to learn to use 'em, but you'll get so that you can walk fine—perhaps not run; I don't know about that, but walk all right. And you'll look the same as ever. Say, Peter, I've seen them! Doctor Cleveland showed me, because I was sort of—well, I worried a bit about it, didn't know exactly how it would be for you. It'll be great; they're all right! Now I'm easy in my mind, and so can you be. They won't drag on you; they're—"

"They're an improvement on the ones I had first?" Peter interrupted him quietly. "All right, old man; I'll welcome them with open arms—that wouldn't be suitable, would it, to artificial legs? What am I going to be—on those legs?"

Peter turned on his pillow and lay frowning at the ceiling. The nurse came back; she announced that she had sent out for the ice cream and it would be there shortly.

"Hope it's the flavor you like," said Peter.

The nurse turned sharply upon Giles, and they exchanged glances. She knew that she had been got rid of for a purpose, what that purpose was, and that the hour had come which she and Giles had agreed to dread.

"Well, it had to come sometime," she thought, "and he is in good condition." She thrust her thermometer into Peter's mouth. He made an impatient movement to rid himself of it, thought better of it and let it remain, pointing at an angle to the ceiling.

"All right," announced the nurse, reading, then shaking the instrument before she crossed over to drop it into the alcohol. "Oh, a degree and one-fifth; that's merely natural," she answered to Giles' inquiring glance. "Better eat the cream when it is here, Mr. Cassett; Doctor Barnes thought it would be refreshing to you, a good idea."

Peter did not reply, but when the ice cream came he did eat a little of it.

"Dear old Hermit! He is trying to be good!" thought Giles, accurately interpreting Peter's submission to the nurse. He knew that it was because Peter was fighting rebellion in his soul, because he was tempted to rebel with all the strength of his will and desires against the blow that had fallen upon him, that he dared not let himself disobey these trifling suggestions. He knew that he must not open the gates to the flood beating up within him.

When Giles was leaving him that night Peter spoke to him softly:

"Monk, ask Father Coigne if he will lend me his crucifix? That crucifix in his own room, the one that is carved and colored so wonderfully, the one

with the Face he talked about to me. Tell him mine is too small; I want to see—the Wounds in the Feet better.”

Giles caught his breath; he could not answer. Peter understood; he pressed Giles’ hand.

“You know there was always that in me which had to be shoved down,” Peter said. “I seemed to know that God Almighty would discipline it. Tell Father Coigne, too, that he’d better come here soon. I want the sacraments, I guess. It’s all right, old Monk. Don’t you worry! I’m getting on. They used to teach us we wouldn’t go wrong if we wanted to go right. I do want to stand pat—even if I can’t stand any other way. Don’t you worry. I know God is still God—but I want to see Father Coigne’s crucifix!”

Father Coigne took the crucifix from its hook on the wall of his chamber, and put it into Giles’ hand.

“Saints are beaten out this way, as Peter is getting shaped,” he said. “Don’t fret over him, Giles. He’s probably better off than you and I are. I’ve got to go to see the bishop to-morrow, or I’d hasten over to Peter the first thing in the morning. I’ll try to get there after I get home on the 9.10 in the evening; he won’t be harmed by later sleep than usual, in fact, I doubt that he sleeps so early now.

“Peter knew about his loss, but he was too weak to realize its meaning; knowledge is not realization necessarily. We understood that Peter had to go down into the depths for a while. Poor strong-willed boy! But as long as out of the depths he cries to Thee, O Lord, he’ll pull up. Tell Peter I’ll get around to-morrow night, if I can, but I’ll surely be there to bring him Holy Communion the day after

to-morrow. Tell him I'm saying Mass for him, no other intention, twice each week. Fine Peter!"

Peter took the crucifix which Giles brought to him, with Father Coigne's message, but made no comment. All that day he lay with it clasped in both hands, gazing at it. He hardly spoke a word throughout the day; the nurse found an increased temperature, a quickened pulse, but Peter did not utter his thoughts, not even to Giles. Sometimes, when he thought no one was seeing, the nurse saw Peter raise the crucifix and kiss the image of the nail-held Feet.

"I wonder!" thought the nurse. "These strange Catholics! You wouldn't expect him to love his God just now."

Father Coigne came at nearly ten that evening. He was a privileged person in the hospital, superior to regulations and hours. He sat beside Peter till after midnight, then left him to return early in the morning, before he had said his Mass.

"Good night, Father," Peter said as the priest left him. "But it is the dawn!"

Justine Coburn also had been down into the depths since she had learned of Peter's misfortune, but she, poor child, did not consciously cry to the Divine out of her darkness! It is one of the greatest of the countless mercies of Divine Pity that the cry of the soul that has been stifled by birth and subsequent muffling, is heard in its choked whispering, and answered.

Through wakeful nights, long hours of waking, with short moments of troubled sleep, hardly more refreshing, Justine lay staring into darkness, facing

her own pain and Peter's maimed life. It showed to her exactly what her feeling for Peter Cassett was, that she passed over the fact that she loved him, and that he never would love her, as of no consequence. She knew herself, and she saw ahead of her bleak years of loneliness, hopelessness, but she would have accepted a bleak eternity if by it she could have purchased happiness for Peter; if she could have restored to him his body unmutilated she would have given her own to be torn by dogs. Not Peter himself had a stronger will, a more intense and tempestuous nature than the tall, pale, proud daughter of Justin Coburn.

Since she had realized that to Peter religion was not an opinion, indifferently held, but a glowing personal possession, dearer than life, Justine had thought much on the subject; she had read Thomas à Kempis, the one Catholic book within her reach, and she felt that here, again, was the mysterious something which she felt in Peter, and also in Isabelle. The vision of Peter keeping watch by night before the altar, like a Knight of the Holy Grail, was before her eyes since Isabelle had told her that thus Peter kept vigil. And for reparation! She had never been able, as she had said to Peter, to free herself from the bondage of the Incarnate God, revealed in the New Testament, which Justine had studiously read. It was a dominant Figure that the simple, profound record revealed; involuntarily she partly held to It, while denying the meaning which alone would raise It above the ranks of falsehood, and the dreams of visionaries. To Peter, she knew, and through him and Isabelle she knew it was true of all Catholics, this Figure shone as the Beatific Vision,

veiled only because men's eyes could not bear the full light. It was to atone for the outrages of Christ's passion that Peter, in the twentieth century, in the Woodcock church, kept prayerful adoration! Justine had stretched out her hands from her darkness, and though her love for Peter lifted them, nevertheless they reached out to the Infinite sincerely, and she had almost felt the hem of that garment of faith within her fingers.

But now Peter's God had failed him! As a reward for the faith which had awed the girl, Peter was maimed, his life deformed at its beginning. Better to deny God, as she had almost done since she had tried to formulate opinions for herself, than to believe in Him, blindly adore Him, if He were either the futile, or the unjust God which His desertion of Peter showed Him to be.

How easy for Him, if He saw and cared about mankind, if he were almighty, for Him to have held back that drunken man, so that Peter would not have felt impelled to rescue him! Or, better still, because it was to Peter first that the God he served owed help, if He had put forth His almighty power and restrained Peter, or upheld him as the Gospel narrative said that He had upheld that other Peter, when he was about to go down!

All darkness! All vain! She would have died to save Peter from what had come to him, and God, whom Peter loved and trusted, and sacrificed to serve, had not so much as inspired Peter to keep back! And the drunkard had not needed help; he had crossed over unhurt!

Thus, over and over, through waking hours of misery during the day, and almost equally wakeful



hours of bleaker misery through the darkness of night, Justine fought her battle, defeated, wounded to death, but not slain.

Then hope came to her as in one or another form it must come to all wretched souls, if they are to continue to live, and Justine took a resolution.

Why should she fear the comments of her neighbors? Other people's ways and ideas had never meant much to Justine Coburn. From her childhood she had gone her singularly independent and individual way, without bothering with other people. She loved Peter Cassett; he did not love her. She should love him as long as she lived; he would never love her. Well, then, she would devote her life to him, she would do what lay in her power to further his good, his happiness. She would begin that day by going to see him in the hospital, read to him, make him feel that she was bleeding with sympathy for his wounds, and perhaps she could lighten their weight upon him by ever so little; the least good were worth a great sacrifice on her part, when the good was Peter's.

Justine was still young. Mentally she had matured early, but like many children whose minds far out-strip the body, she was singularly innocent of evil. She was still a child in her enthusiasm, her lack of knowledge of the forces which dominate human beings, except as she had a bookish knowledge of them, which is often more misleading than no knowledge whatever. Not Una herself walked through the world more maidenly in thought and feeling than Justine Coburn. It appealed to her high-spirited, visionary ideals that she might consecrate her life to the comforting of Peter. She loved

him intensely, but she did not love him passionately; that there was any reason why a girl like her should not thus consecrate her life to Peter's welfare never crossed her enkindled mind.

It was the morning that Father Coigne had carried Holy Communion to Peter in the hospital that Justine set out early to find Isabelle. She had not seen her since the accident; she wondered how Isabelle had taken it.

She met Isabelle returning from Mass. She was pale, and she looked thinner, but her face was sweet and calm, albeit sad, and she smiled at Justine as usual.

"Oh, Justine, are you coming to see me? We'll have breakfast together," cried Isabelle.

"Have you been to church?" asked Justine, letting her glance fall on the soft leather binding of Isabelle's missal.

"Yes, for Peter," said Isabelle. "He is getting better steadily, you know. We all—Giles and the Guernsey girls, father, Mrs. Riordan, Peter's housekeeper, oh, and Mr. and Mrs. Guernsey, hear Mass, and receive, for Peter three times a week, and we are all making a novena for him, to the Holy Souls. So he is getting better, mind as well as body." Isabelle smiled brightly at Justine, plainly expecting her to share the joy of this good news.

"For heaven's sake, Isabelle, where is your logic?" exclaimed Justine involuntarily. "You pray for his recovery to a God who might easily have prevented the horrible thing! How can you be so credulous, so unreasonable! And it was all futile! The man for whom Peter suffers was not hurt; he cleared the track, while Peter's wicked shoe threw him! Even

if that creature had been killed, what was he worth beside Peter?"

"I felt that at first, Justine. One can hardly help these thoughts, but afterward I saw that he was not fit to die, and Peter was prepared. Better Peter, even if he had died, than a soul in mortal sin hurried to judgment. Of course, the man was not hurt! That means that Peter's sacrifice was not needed for him, but we don't see yet what else it may have done," said Isabelle.

"Well, heaven deliver me from such easy philosophy over the suffering of anyone I love!" cried Justine. "If you can be so complacent about Peter, Peter so splendid, young, strong, loyal to his friends, then I—well, I surely do not understand!"

"We are not complacent over Peter, Justine. We are heart-sick; we suffer with him. But if Peter is going to gain some great spiritual good out of it—we must hope and trust, Justine! Don't you see that it is really *must*, not choice? Giles has spent every day with Peter, Justine; he has suffered almost as much as Peter. Oh, don't think we are indifferent! Oh, we care, we care! But time is short, and our eyes are feeble; we cannot see the brightness of the true light!" Isabelle's voice shook, her tears overflowed; she wiped her eyes like a little girl with the back of her hand, and the childish movement, recalling their play-days together, mollified Justine.

"Well, I suppose there is something in heaven and earth—there surely is in heaven, if there is a heaven at all—not dreamed of in my philosophy. Never mind, Isa; I suppose Peter himself would agree with you," Justine said. "Have you been to see him?"

"No. They thought it might be bad for him, till

the danger of fever was past. I am going soon," said Isabelle. "He wants to be taken to his house, have a nurse there, because Canis Major is pining, and Giles cannot console him as the days pass, and Peter does not come. Isn't that like Peter?"

"I am going to see him. I am going to sit with him, read to him, talk to him, cheer him, if he will let me. I am going to show him that his old playmate would die to help him, if she could," cried Justine.

"Die! Oh, Justine, dear, poor Justine!" exclaimed Isabelle.

"Yes. And I know he loves you," said Justine vehemently. "I do not care. I have decided that it is worse than nonsense to be ashamed to love such as Peter Cassett. Why should I not love him? You love Giles, Peter loves you! How much more should I love Peter? It is no shame to be honest. Love that asks nothing for itself is honorable. It would be another thing if I hoped to make Peter love me. I don't. No one will ever love me, but perhaps I can lighten one hour for Peter. That's no little hope."

Changing her mind about her visit to Isabelle, Justine swung around and went away without another word, leaving Isabelle, stunned and sorry, to resume her way alone.

## CHAPTER VIII

*"For Never Anything Can Be Amiss when Simplicity and Duty Tender It."*

**J**USTINE walked rapidly to the hospital. Since she had determined to go to Peter's aid, every moment of delay seemed to her not only unendurable, but almost wicked, as if she, being called to a high office, must not defer its fulfillment.

"There's a lady, a young lady waiting downstairs, asking if she may see Mr. Cassett," the attendant announced to the nurse who responded to the summons upon the door of Peter's room.

A private patient, recovering from wounds, there was no restriction upon visitors to Peter. Indeed, the doctors welcomed them; the important factor in his recovery being a cheerful mind. The Guernsey girls and their mother had been frequent visitors; Mrs. Riordan had come several times to see him, and Father Coigne, as well as many men in the congregation, had faithfully tried to "pull Peter through" by visits and cheerful gossip of the big World, and the small world of Woodcock.

Mr. Chatillon had come, but not Isabelle. Unconsciously Peter watched the door, when it opened to each knock, in the hope of seeing her, but Isabelle, though she sent messages, and all sorts of delicious concoctions to tempt his appetite, and flowers to fill his room with fragrance, did not come herself.

"It is a lady, a young lady, Mr. Cassett," said the nurse. "I think we are ready to receive her. You

don't want anything? After she is here, you will not mind if I go over to the reception room on this floor for a while? My mother is ill, and I want to get a letter off to my sister to tell her what she must do for her, what the doctor she has will never in this world think of telling her, if I know him."

"Surely, write the letter! I don't want a thing. I am perfectly comfortable, could stay alone for hours, but with a visitor, a young lady visitor! I'm all right! And I give you notice that we are going out of here in a day or two! I'm going to finish this job in my own home!" Peter tried to speak blithely, and fairly well succeeded.

"I don't think Doctor Cleveland objects. He told me that you would do as well. Here's your visitor, Mr. Cassett," the nurse interrupted herself and opened the door.

Peter lay on his side, looking hungrily at the entrance. His eyes were still sunken, his face pale and thin, but there had settled upon it a visible stillness, a sort of hushed peace that was remarkable, changing that vital young face into something of the dignity and repose of death.

Peter's eyes were eager now, perhaps a little fearful; they were anticipating Isabelle's little figure in the doorway. Instead, as the door swung back, they saw Justine, tall, emaciated, worn looking, her face ashen above her dark furs, her fine eyes seeking, full of pain.

"Peter!" she said softly, and came forward.

For an instant Peter could not master his acute disappointment. Fortunately the contraction of his face, the way he set his teeth over his under lips, was interpreted by Justine as due to the pang he felt in

seeing for the first time since he was crippled, one of his childhood's comrades, with whom he had run and romped.

"Justine Coburn! And so early! I never thought of you. You are good to come, Justine," Peter said, and put out his hand to take hers.

"If I had thought that I might come, if I had not been so stupidly overwhelmed, Peter, I could have been here long ago, read to you, tried to do something! But I'm no sort of good," Justine said, searching his face with her keen eyes.

"Well, Giles has been here right along, hardly off at all. And at first I was too sleepy to be entertained. Then—well, I haven't cared much to talk, though I've had visitors. Mary and Margaret Guernsey have tried to read to me, but they didn't get on very well—not with their reading, but with my hearing. I suppose I'll need my friends most from now on, as I begin to get around again. You're in plenty of time, you kind Disting!" Peter smiled at her whimsically, as he used the name which he and Giles had found so funny when they were children, which then had infuriated Justine. Now it brought the tears to her eyes, and the color into her white cheeks.

She threw her furs on the foot of Peter's bed and her heavy coat after them, then, afraid that the weight might hurt Peter, she removed them and dropped them on the floor. It stabbed her like a fresh realization of what had happened, that when she lifted them the bed was smooth beneath her hand; their weight no longer could rest on Peter's feet.

Trembling, Justine took the chair which the nurse

had placed for her, and drew it a little nearer to the bed.

"You look well, Peter," she said slowly, "yet you are changed. You are different. You do not look ill, though. You look—Peter, you look content!"

"Well, Justine, my dear, that's a fine way to look, and a finer way to feel!" said Peter quietly. "I feel content—to-day. I suppose it may take a while to get contentment established permanently, but it's coming! And after a while again, so is happiness."

Justine's glance followed an unconscious movement of Peter's fingers, and rested upon Father Coigne's crucifix.

"Are you keeping that up?" she cried angrily.

"Keeping up what?" asked Peter.

"You have a crucifix," said Justine.

Peter drew it forth from beneath the spread which had covered it, all but a portion which had slipped out when Peter had turned to see his caller. He held it up.

"It is not mine," he said. "I borrowed it from Father Coigne because I have never seen one that I liked as well. Isn't it wonderful? So profoundly suffering, so expressive of pity, so sublime."

Justine looked at it with unwilling admiration, a curious shrinking that was, at the same time, attraction.

"Peter, I may as well tell you! You had impressed me a good deal with what you said to me the last time I talked to you, but you impressed me more with the living power of your own faith. I was beginning to think and read—but now!" Justine looked at the crucifix this time with unalloyed repulsion. "I was right and you were wrong. There is



no God, at least not one that interferes in the affairs of men. You were left to yourself. It's all nonsense; no one knows a thing about it. How can you go on adoring and praying to a God who is perfectly useless to you when you need Him? You, stricken like this, with that crucifix! When I heard what had happened to you, splendid Peter, I was overwhelmed with the pain of it, but in the second place I was furious that I had begun to think maybe your God did, was, what you thought! And both feelings remain in me! I would die to put you back as you were, Peter, and besides, I am bitter, defrauded of hope, to know that your God fails you, and my agnosticism right." Justine leaned forward as she poured out her passionate words, trembling, her eyes afire, tearless.

Young as he was, Peter felt that she was appealing to him, to him, crippled and struck down, to help her again as he had begun to help her before. It was only afterward that he realized that no one of the other friends who had visited him had expressed pity for him in any such terms as Justine had used.

Peter turned a little more upon his side toward her, and laid the crucifix, with its compassionate Figure toward her, against his breast.

"Poor Justine," he said gently, and Justine did not recognize the remote sweetness in his manner for that kindness of the saints whose love and pity go out to all the world, themselves apart from it. It was the manner of one who, in the brief time since he had been smitten, had journeyed far.

"Listen, old playmate," Peter went on. "I am going to tell you what I have told no one else, not even Giles, only Father Coigne in confession. I

know exactly what you feel. I have been through black waters since I came back to myself, after the first weakness and sleepiness had passed. I thought bitter thoughts of God; I rebelled against Him in my heart; I doubted Him, His providence, His human revelation of Himself, His existence; as far as we feeble things which He had made go, it seemed to me that He might as well not exist. Justine, that was horrible! What is it to lose one's members, even one's body, life, compared to the loss of God! I lay and thought and thought, despairing blasphemies. I would not submit! I dared not utter these thoughts; there was that much decency in me that I would not upset another's faith, but mine, I thought was gone. Justine, there is no depth outside of hell so deep and black as that separation from God. After all, that is hell—if it continues. It has not continued. I suppose that my faith was overlaid with my agony. Father Coigne was so pityingly kind to me, he so excused me on the ground of the horror of my vigorous youth at its tragic maiming, the shock of a sudden facing of things I had not known, that I can see how Almighty God, looking down on so small a creature trying to measure His ways, also pitied me. And I suppose, too, that though it seemed to me only bitterness, the old love and longing for God was calling to Him through the darkness, and He heard. For suddenly, Justine, it was as if a hand were laid upon my head, and another upon my lips, and I felt wounds in those hands. And a great cool quietness descended upon me, and all the turmoil in my soul was still. And a Voice said to me: 'Peter, dear, did not I cry out, *Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani?* Do I not know your

desolation? But I am here. I did not let the other Peter sink when the waters rose around him; I will not let you go. Do you remember Gethsemani? Why, Peter, can't *you* trust *Me?*" And I sent Giles for this crucifix, and I kissed those Wounded Feet, and I knew I could happily trust them to come after me, and these Wounded Hands to hold me up, now, when I learn to walk again without my feet. And this morning, Justine, Father Coigne brought me Holy Communion. So the Wounded Feet did come after me; they did not fail me."

Peter's voice, his wonderful, moving voice ceased, and he smiled at Justine, touching the crucifix as he did so. Never in his life had Peter Cassett spoken thus of the deep matters between him and his God, but he knew that he had passed through what Justine was suffering in order to help her. He must open before her the secrets of the Spirit of God. He, unable to walk, must go after this soul. With a great flood of joy Peter realized that he was shown why he had been struck down; already the answer to his "Why?" for his loss was whispering to him. And now that he was a cripple, now that he had tasted worse than death, self-consciousness fell from him. Out of his experience he could call to others with entire simplicity, helping them.

Justine did not move or speak for a long time. Her eyes were fixed on Peter's, she struggled for coherent thoughts, but none came to her. She was swept along into the edge of this stream of mystic spirituality which her nature prepared her to understand. Yet her habit of mind compelled her to resistance to it; she strove to answer Peter, yet, unknown to herself, in this impulse was included a hope that

she might draw from him proof that he was right.

At last she said: "This is beautiful, Peter. I think I am glad that you have this comfort, though I do not like illusion, even to be happy in it. But isn't it emotion, dear Peter? Does it prove a thing that you, beaten down, hungry for what you had long loved, make yourself believe that it exists?"

"Justine, faith is not reason. It is not opposed to reason, but it far transcends it. Our little catechism, a compendium of wisdom for a cent, says that 'faith is a gift infused into our soul.' There you are. Infusion presupposes something which infuses, the Holy Spirit. And it is not injustice, as I know you were just going to say—"

"How could you have known that?" cried Justine.

"I saw it coming," smiled Peter. "It is not injustice to infuse faith, because it will be given to everyone who hungers and thirsts after it. You see, Justine, what with pride in our own cleverness, the foolishness that expects to measure Infinity with a head that wears a hat about seven and a quarter inches in diameter—if it is a fairly good-sized head—and our darling sins which we won't quit, and our keen interest in getting on in this world, one way or another, we mortals put something in the way, and so we miss the gift of faith. It proves God's existence to my mind beyond doubt that I, bound up in flesh which impedes spirit, and beclouds vision, feel and know Him just as truly as I can feel your hand when I take it; more truly, because I feel your hand with my sense of touch, but I feel God with an almost unbearable, flooding ecstasy that is not of mind or body, but in my soul."

"That man, the drunkard you tried to save, didn't

need you. He is all right. Do you call that Providence watching over you?" asked Justine, summoning her resistance.

"I had that in my mind, too. But what do you suppose, Justine?" Peter spoke almost mischievously, boyishly, as if he knew a fine jest. "Father Coigne hunted him up. He thought, maybe, if the poor old scalawag knew that a young chap had lost his legs, was crippled, you know, it might hit him hard, and help pull him up. Father Coigne is great! He was terribly conscience-stricken, and Father Coigne is not without hope of pulling him up to be an ornament to society! So how about it?" Peter fairly chuckled. "Even that trivial side of it—I mean trivial as compared to the bigger issue—may work out, and the sacrifice of my feet set that poor derelict on his! You've got to own up, Justine, that it's worth losing more than I've lost to save a soul!"

Justine arose. Her face was a study. She stooped, and picked up her coat and furs.

"I don't acknowledge anything of the sort, Peter Cassett," she said. "I don't get that at all. You are, to my mind, far more valuable than that creature's soul."

"Because you don't know how to measure souls, Justine. Here's the measure of the value of a soul." He held up the crucifix.

"Sorry I can't hold your coat for you, Justine," Peter added, feeling the wisdom of showing Justine that his acceptance of his lot was going to restore to him his light-heartedness. "I'll be able to do all those pretty tricks later on. And I'm going home, maybe, to-morrow. Giles can't keep Canis Major going, and I must not let him mourn himself to death.

Anyway, I'd rather be at home. I'm no end grateful to you for coming, Justine. Will you come to see me again, till I can go to see you?"

"I want to come, Peter. I want to do anything that I can do for you. I've thought of you night and day since—" Justine checked herself.

"That's all right, dear; you're a trump," said Peter gently. "But, Justine, get hold on my comfort and the truth. Don't you see I'm all right? I've lost a lot, but I've gained, too. We can't tell at the time where the best good lies. Don't you doubt that—nor God!"

"You almost have made me feel that you are fortunate. I do know that I envy you," said Justine.

"No need of envying me," said Peter cheerily, patting the back of her hand as it clasped his right one. "There is enough for all of us in Infinity."

Justine went down the street from the hospital, her eyes upon the ground, her mind preoccupied with the thoughts which her talk with Peter had set in train. Thus she might have collided with Isabelle and Giles as she turned a corner, had not Giles called out:

"Honk, honk! Justine, you'll lose your license."

"You saw Peter? You said you were going to," asked Isabelle. "How is he?"

"He is wonderfully well. I went to see him because he was lame, but he welcomed me because I was blind," Justine answered cryptically, and went on without giving Isabelle or Giles a chance to ask her meaning.

"Now there's a sibyl for you!" exclaimed Giles. "Justine's a queer girl."

Giles was allowed to go straight to Peter's room,

which he had occupied almost equally with Peter since the accident. One of his sisters so often came with him that Isabelle's accompanying Giles upstairs was taken for granted.

"Brace up, Isa dear!" whispered Giles, seeing that Isabelle was trembling as they neared the chamber door.

Then Giles opened the door and stepped back. Peter looking listlessly toward it, saw the sight for which his eyes had hungered, which his imagination had countless times imaged. Isabelle, hanging back, her face all moved and sweet, tears in her eyes, a quivering smile on her lips, stood there.

Peter extended his hands and then clasped them. "Oh, Isabelle!" he whispered.

Isabelle ran to him and knelt beside his bed; she took both his clasped hands in hers and held them close to her breast as if they had been some small, wounded creature.

"Dearest Peter! Dear, dear, splendid Peter!" she said over and over again. And the tears which Justine's misery at the sight of Peter helpless, burned up and forbade falling, fell plenteously from Isabelle's eyes as she knelt beside him.

"Don't mind, dear! Don't mind so much, kind, sweet dear," Peter murmured. "I knew you would grieve. I hated to think I bothered you. I'll be fine and all right—soon."

"Peter, I've prayed and prayed for you! I think the Blessed Virgin, even the Sacred Heart, thought: 'Here is that girl again, praying for Peter! Doesn't she know I love him and will help him?' But I couldn't stop, Peter! Did you think it strange I stayed away from you? I had to, for a while. I'm

cowardly, Peter, and so fond of you! But you had all the others; you didn't want me," Isabelle spoke rapidly, but now she was smiling at Peter.

"I always want you, Isabelle. Waking or sleeping, sound or crippled, I want you! I've watched that door for you to come through it, for your sweet face to smile on me, just as it does now. Oh, Isabelle, I've wanted you!"

Peter's sunken eyes devoured every line of her face, every tint of its beauty. He was not in the least like the Peter whom Justine had seen, ready with his words, forgetting himself in her need. This was a Peter who found his words with difficulty, who was keenly conscious of himself, yet not conscious of how piteously he implored bounty for that starved self.

"I'll come often, Peter," Isabelle promised. "You will be at home to-morrow, Giles says. Then I'll come to read to you, to sit with you. But you are lots better, aren't you, Peter? You look well—" She hesitated. "You are changed, you look older, but you look far better than I feared you would. And, oh, Peter, suppose we had lost you! We easily might have! And that would have been hard to bear."

Peter had regained mastery over himself, swept away by the unexpected apparition of Isabelle, which had set quivering all the pain of his longing for her which was never cured, only stifled. At first conscious only of her, that she had come, that she knelt beside him, that his hands were held warm against her pitying heart, now Peter remembered Giles, standing, watching them both with misery in his face, and he remembered that Isabelle was not for him,



but for Giles.

Peter gently withdrew his hands, making a pretense of adjusting his pillow, and of laying Father Coigne's crucifix farther over, beyond falling.

"Oh, I'm not through my school term in this world yet, Isabelle," he said with a little laugh. "You would miss me, wouldn't you? How is the car? Do you still drive it and repair it like a perfect lady?"

"Peter! As though I wanted you to repair my car!" Isabelle cried, hurt for a moment by mockery when she was feeling profoundly moved. Then she realized that Peter was struggling to get back to the old commonplaces of worn-out jests, never having great meaning, and she helped him by pretending offence, as she always had. "You'll never treat me respectfully, Peter Cassett! I can't come to the hospital to see a patient and punish him as he deserves, but when you're out and about, and come to see me again I shall tell the maid to send you in to talk to father, and I shall say to you if I pass you in the hall: 'Good day, Mr. Cassett. I am but a mere girl, who is unable to drive, or repair, or to entertain a man capable of these things. *Good* day, Mr. Cassett; I will not intrude upon your superiority!'"

It was a sorry attempt at comedy, but Peter was grateful for it. He thought that it proved that Isabelle did not understand what her coming had meant to him, how he had hungered for her, how he had turned to her, yielding himself for a few minutes to satisfying that hunger. He knew that he was in danger of telling himself that he was so fortunate that it gave him a right, that amputation had at least cut him free of the obligations which honor had laid upon him.

"Are you going?" Peter asked. Isabelle had risen to her feet in her pretended repudiation of him. "Good-bye, mere girl! After all, I'd rather a girl were a mere one! Bless you for coming, dear Isabelle. You'll come again?"

In spite of himself his voice yearned to her.

"I'll come again, mere Man! Soon. You may be mere yourself, Peter, but you are a man!" Isabelle answered.

Giles went with Isabelle, out of the hospital, down the street. He had never said to her that he loved her; she had never responded to his love in words, yet both knew!

"Isabelle, we must not be happy, not ever, my darling! It is too cruelly hard on him! You must convince Peter that you love him; you must go to Peter," Giles said, breaking a long silence as they walked toward Isabelle's home.

"Yes," said Isabelle. "I see that, too, Giles. We must give all we can to Peter. I will go to Peter."

## CHAPTER IX

*"Love Sought Is Good, but Given Unsought Is Better."*

PETER CASSETT'S return to his own house took place on the day succeeding the one on which the first severe frost of the season had turned the maple trees, which were Woodcock's boast, into the semblance of a conflagration, for the entire length of all the residence streets.

His nurse was not to accompany him, after all. Justine Coburn had come to Peter with a suggestion which was to be carried out.

"Peter," Justine said, almost timidly, yet beginning at once on her subject after she had greeted him, with true Justinian directness, "there's something I thought I ought to tell you, that you'd want to know. I've been down to Woodcock Claw several times since the day you asked me to keep my hands off the Italians down there. I've kept my word to you, but I've been down there. I've been trying to see what you meant—"

"You would never break your word, Justine," Peter said.

"No, that's true! Shakespeare thought those who had not honor were poor, but people like me, who are exceedingly poor, according to you, often lay great stress on honor," retorted Justine, half derisively, half sadly. "There's a big boy down there, quite a giant, for an Italian; about seventeen, I think. He admires you as a sort of demi-god; he has ath-

letic aspirations. He has come after me to talk of you since he discovered that I knew you, and he has taken it hard that you were hurt. Now, he doesn't care any more about the Presbyterian Church than, evidently, he cares about his own Church, but he goes to it because he is promised helpful boosting in his burning desire to 'get on,' to be 'Americanized.' His name is Dominico, but he says that is the same as Sunday, so he has himself called Billy, after Billy Sunday. I think that says it all, Peter. Now he is a gentle giant, and he would be as kind and deft around you, serving you while you get used to things, as a girl, yet strong and dependable. He exalts you now; if you took him and let him do for you, he would regard you as his prophet and guide. I thought, if you felt about these things as you've said, you might like to take on Dominico, give up a nurse. You don't need a nurse; only an attendant. And I know you could easily pull this affectionate, overgrown boy back into the Catholic Church, and anchor him there to stay."

Peter had been making interrupting exclamations as Justine laid before him her plan, but she had not allowed him to check her till it was fully before him. Now Peter cried: "But, Justine! You splendid Justine! What a trump you are! Indeed, you're keeping your promise to me, *plus!* And you're the first person who has offered me one thing to do that calls me up to action! That's good for me, too!"

"I thought of that," said Justine, reddening with pleasure. "I'm learning to drive a car; father has bought me one. When I'm safe to go with—and that will be soon, I'm not finding it hard—perhaps you will go with me down to the Claw and get hold

of some of the smaller boys down there, if you care to? A young man like you, with your reputation for daring, could get them to eat out of his hand."

"And one whom they would pity," thought Peter, but he said aloud:

"I thought you would not tolerate gas and machines; I thought you were all for a horse?"

"I like a horse better," said Justine, looking embarrassed. "But I realize that I must move faster, nowadays. I like a horse better, but a car is practical, and I aim at practicality. They know me down in the Claw, and I think that they like me. You might go there, too, if you wished to, Peter, and from your point of view, do no end of good. Your priest tries to get hold of them, but they are priest-shy, apparently. That is, until they come to die! They seem to think he is after their money, whereas they are after our money, the Presbyterian and Methodist and Baptist funds, and they get it, too."

"That it should be Justine Coburn who inspires me to be a missionary!" Peter exclaimed whimsically, yet truly marvelling.

"You have something to give them; I have not—we have not!" said Justine, her face crimson. "I've been thinking, and I see that they stand to lose everything, gain nothing but prosperity. I'm not your convert myself, Peter! About Dominico; do you think you'd care to try him?"

"I sure would!" cried Peter. "I don't need a nurse, and the boy needs—what I may get for him. If my nurse won't mind—you see, she expects to go with me—I'll get you to send Dominico right over here."

Peter noted that Justine did not call the Italian

boy "Billy."

Peter's nurse hailed the opportunity to be set free.

"Doctor Cleveland wanted me for another surgical case, but he hated to ask you to let me off. You don't need a trained nurse now, but the doctor knew you counted upon me. I'll show your Italian what to do, and if he is at all capable he can do all that is required. And he'll help you to use crutches better than I could, if he's big and strong," she said.

Thus it came about, through Justine, who thought that she had no faith, that Dominico del Ponte, the boy who had first seen the light in a small house beside a bridge over the Arno, was taken by Peter to be held in his birthright of Faith, and to help Peter to learn to walk again, and that he it was, and not the nurse, who came home with Peter from the hospital when he was dismissed from it on that golden day, after the first heavy frost.

Giles, as a matter of course, accompanied Peter home. He came in the ambulance, and the orderlies from the hospital carried him in on the stretcher and into the room on the lower floor which had been prepared for him, to do away with the risk of stairs when Peter should first begin to use his crutches.

Mrs. Riordan came in to welcome Peter after he had been transferred to his bed, and the orderlies had withdrawn. She came in with a beaming smile upon her face, crimson from emotion, but she was not equal to carrying out her own programme of jovial enthusiasm which should give Peter the welcome that he deserved. She meant to convey to him that to have left the house overflowing with health, to win the races in the sports, and to be brought back to it so long afterward on a litter, both legs

amputated, was of all things the most desirable.

Mrs. Riordan came forward, but half-way across the room her resolution gave out; she threw her apron over her head and rushed away. Her violent sobbing, and the still more violent creaking of her rocking chair reached Peter from the kitchen. Canis Major, emaciated, with staring coat, and drooping muscles, crept up to Peter, uncertain whether he might trust his keen scent and sad eyes to distinguish his vigorous young master in this helpless figure upon the bed. He crept up to Peter, and Peter spoke his name.

With a cry that was human in its note of incredulous longing, and suffering long borne, Canis Major rose on his hind legs and put his head in the hollow of Peter's shoulder, drawing deep breaths, which escaped in shuddering little cries.

"Oh, Peter, my master!" he seemed to say. "I tried to keep up, but you did not come! But a little longer, and I should have died of grieving, my master! Where have you stayed so long, and what have they done to you?"

Peter's hands encompassed the Setter's beautiful head; he looked into the brown eyes, now sunken and lack-lustre, and his own were full of the tears that only this wordless devotion had wrung from him.

"Old boy! Old Canis! I knew I must come back to you if I wanted to find you here! It's all right, poor old chap! Hard on you, but I'm here!" he whispered, laying his head upon the long ears roughened by hunger and distress.

Peter's progress was more rapid, now that he was at home again. His books had been brought down from his own room, those most intimate ones which

he kept in a case in his chamber. So, too, had the pictures which he had chosen to look upon first and last at each dawn and night, been hung where his eyes now rested upon them. Father Coigne had refused to take back the crucifix which had been with Peter through the deep waters of his uttermost despair, to which he had clung as he rose by its help once more to the solid ground. It hung beside his bed, low enough for his hand to reach the Wounds in the Feet. Never in all his life again would Peter Cassett dare to let those Wounded Feet be beyond recall. The sense of his loss overwhelmed him at times with a flood of wretchedness, as if for the first time he knew what had happened to him. But these fearful moments were growing fewer, coming at longer intervals. Peter was coming back to life, to live his life.

The entire Guernsey family made it their business to help Peter to get well. Father Coigne managed to spend more time with him, now that he was at home; the house was nearer than the hospital to the priest's house, and he could informally bestow upon Peter a spare moment here as he could not there.

Dominico proved to be a treasure-trove. Nothing was too hard for him, nothing difficult, nothing ill-done by his deft hands. And the lad's brown eyes rivalled the other brown ones in Canis Major's head in adoration of Peter.

Peter found no resistance to him in Dominico. Peter bade him go to Mass; Dominico went to Mass; to go to confession, Dominico went. Peter taught him what he had not understood about the possibility of being a good, even a rich American, yet holding fast to the Old Faith which he had not



learned in Italy, having been taken away from there when he was a baby, but which he thought was something like the gay headkerchiefs and aprons and beads, the coral or gold hands with the first and little fingers pointed downwards, which the contadina wore, something incongruous to America, to be discarded furtively, shamefacedly. But Peter was an American out and out; he was big, breezy, funny, brave; he won the races; he could knock out almost anyone, not a professional fighter; he knew no end of things, and he enjoyed all sorts of nonsense and fun, and Peter was first of all a Catholic. Therefore Dominico, Billy never again, went devoutly to Mass and Benediction, learned his catechism from Peter, stood up respectfully when Father Coigne came in, and inwardly as well as outwardly revered him—as Peter did! Dominico was a complete salvage—and through Justine Coburn, of all people!

Dominico steadied Peter on the crutches which he was learning to use as an intermediary to the artificial legs for which his severed tissues were not yet sufficiently healed. He laughed at Peter's jokes on his own awkwardness, but Peter saw the moisture in Dominico's deer-like eyes when he laughed, and loved him for it. He was glad and thankful every day that he had Dominico, and this for his own sake.

Mr. Coburn came one day to see Peter, and Peter caught at his crutches and rose to receive him.

"Peter, my dear boy, I protest!" cried Mr. Coburn, distressed.

"It's good for me to get agility on them, and not to let myself grow lazy," Peter said cheerfully. "Let me offer you this chair, Mr. Coburn; it's kind of you to come." Peter held one crutch under his arm and

with that hand pulled forward a chair but a few, superfluous inches. Peter was beginning to test what he could do with one disengaged hand, balancing himself skillfully.

"I am ashamed to be so late in coming," said Justin Coburn. "But I was not sure that you care to see any but intimate, or young friends. I hope you understand it was not indifference that kept me away, Peter?"

"Surely, Mr. Coburn," answered Peter, noting that he had again become "Peter," was no longer "Mr. Cassett." "Everyone has been most kind."

"Everyone has been most concerned for you, Peter," Mr. Coburn corrected him. "You are getting into fine shape. How long do you expect to use these?"

"Till spring," answered Peter. "I'm to throw away these crutches by spring, and be on my own feet—though this time I'll have to buy my own feet. Doctor Cleveland says I'd better make haste slowly, to get a thorough-going result."

"Exactly. Sounds like good advice. Doctor Cleveland's is sure to be that; one of the best surgeons anywhere, I'm told. You are quite able to talk business, I think?" Mr. Coburn suggested.

"Nothing in the world to prevent my talking on any subject, Mr. Coburn!" declared Peter. "But I've no business to talk—in that sense!"

Mr. Coburn smiled. "Did you know that Mr. Guernsey has backed his son, Giles, taken an office for him, and that he has begun as an architect? Of course you knew!" he corrected himself.

"Not a word of it!" cried Peter. "Isn't that like old Monk! He hated to talk to me of his luck,

though he'd know his luck and my luck were one and the same thing."

"Young Guernsey has opened his office. I'm told that through the influence of the priest here, of Father Coigne, he has an order for a small church, with a house adjoining. I'm told Giles Guernsey is delighted, and hopes to get orders without the help of influence, on the strength of the merit of his achievement."

"He will get them," declared Peter.

"Now, then, if Guernsey is launched, and you can't have a scruple about taking his place in our house, will you consider coming into our employ, Peter? You will recall my saying that I had it in mind to make you this offer. The offer is open to you now. I want you to fill a position of considerable responsibility; not much bodily activity is required for it. You would be able to take it as soon as you could get about on your temporary crutches. I—we—want you to oversee the quality of our shipments, to make sure that they come up to our standard, a high standard, as you know, Peter. You will be entrusted with this responsibility because we must have a man of entire integrity, who cannot be tampered with. There have never arisen conditions which involve the exercise of more than acute observation, accuracy, but it is conceivable that such conditions might arise as our house goes farther in putting upon the market our distinguished monopoly, our remarkably fine and valuable output. Your salary will not be incommensurate with your position. You must be skilled and incorruptible; those qualities are worth paying for."

Mr. Coburn paused at the end of his somewhat

pompous speech, and waited. Peter knew that it was pompous because Justin Coburn was cast in a mould that involved heavy material for his ideas to be worked out, but he saw that Mr. Coburn was sincerely anxious to hear what he should say.

What Peter said first, with a laugh, was:

"You can't pay for incorruptibility, Mr. Coburn; when you paid for it, it would not be incorruptible! But I'm tremendously obliged to you for thinking I'm trustworthy. Why do you want a cripple?"

He hated himself for having said it, but the words were spoken.

"Peter, my dear boy! In no sense will you actually be a cripple!" cried Mr. Coburn, distressed and shocked. "You will go about among men, scarcely impeded by your accident. But my daughter—"

"Has Justine asked you to take me on? I won't owe anything to a woman's pity!" cried Peter.

"That is a natural feeling in a man, Peter Cassett, but you would not owe anything to Miss Coburn's pity. Are you forgetting that I spoke to you of this matter before anyone could have imagined that you might need pity? Even then, my daughter, as I was about to say, knowing that I was considering Giles Guernsey, at his father's request, yet not feeling that he was the right person, even then Miss Coburn said to me that from your childhood up you had been honorable beyond the shadow of suspicion. My daughter's estimate of you is not due to your misfortune."

Mr. Coburn spoke with considerable feeling. It seemed to Peter that something distressed him as he alluded to Justine. He reddened slightly, and his brow knit, while his formality of speech suffered

from his hesitation.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Coburn! I'm trying not to get warped by what has happened," Peter said with his engaging frankness. "There's more danger of a fellow's getting to be a suspicious grouch when he's come such a cropper as I have, than there is of his being lame in his body. I'm trying not to be touchy; forgive me."

"Why, Peter, my boy, there's nothing to forgive!" cried Mr. Coburn with more spontaneous cordiality than he had shown Peter. "I thought, and still think, that the estimate in which a person with my daughter's cleverness, keenness of insight and complete honesty, holds you is conclusive. She holds you high, basing her opinion on the ingrained qualities you manifested in childhood: there hardly could be a higher recommendation to my trust."

"Justine is the finest sort of girl; you're quite right as to that, Mr. Coburn, and she surely has been good to me!" cried Peter. "Well, then, Mr. Coburn, I want like the dickens to get into something. I've been thinking for a good while that I'd like to get on my feet—start in business. If you want me to try it, if you'll try me, and think I'm worth showing what you want done, I'll gladly make a stab at filling your place. And I'm much obliged for this visit and offer; it's the tonic I need."

Mr. Coburn wisely refrained from saying that he was sure Justine had that fact in mind. He was hoping against hope that his beloved girl had not given to Peter the love which her reception of the news of his injury indicated that she had given him, but he knew Justine too well to cherish the hope. He looked at Peter with dislike that Justine Coburn

might love him, a young man without prospect, now a cripple, an incorrigible Roman Catholic. Yet he looked at him tenderly because in him his beloved one child's happiness might be bound up.

"Then this is settled, Peter," he said. "I am glad that it is settled favorably to my desire. When do you think you will be able to begin?"

"I'll practise fancy steps all the time, Mr. Coburn," said Peter. "This is Thursday; say a week from Monday? Would that be all right? And may I come down before that to learn the alphabet of my duties with you?"

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Coburn heartily. "You're well plucked, Peter Cassett!"

Going out of the door of Peter's house, Mr. Coburn fell back to hold it open for Isabelle Chatillon, coming in.

"She looks like Jeanne d'Arc!" thought Mr. Coburn, accurately appraising the look of high resolve on Isabelle's face.

Canis Major met Isabelle in the hall and escorted her in to Peter. Canis Major was rounded out, and his muscles no longer drooped. Peter had come back to him; Canis Major evidently saw that the least he could do was to come back to Peter, and not to complete his far-advanced journey to death.

"I have brought you one whom I love, Master Peter!" Canis Major conveyed to Peter.

"Isabelle!" cried Peter, never able to see Isabelle come in on one of her frequent visits to him, as he saw Justine and the Guernsey girls enter.

Isabelle crossed over to him quickly. There was something in her manner that made Peter's pulses bound, and which sent the blood into his face.

"Peter, I hope you are glad to see me. I've found it long since I saw you, dear," Isabelle said.

"Isabelle?" cried Peter again. "Am I not always glad to see you?" he added.

Then he remembered what Justin Coburn had just told him of Giles, and he thought that he understood.

"Is it because you wanted to tell me about Giles?" Peter asked. "Mr. Coburn was here——"

"I met him going out," said Isabelle. "Did he tell you Giles had begun to work at his profession?"

"And has an order for a church at the very start!" cried Peter. "The old dunce never said a word to me! I take it hard that Giles could think I'd grudge him any luck! They didn't amputate my love for Giles! And I'm glad for you, my dear. This is going to bring things within reach soon, isn't it? I'm delighted, Isabelle."

"It isn't anything to me, Peter! Don't be foolish!" cried Isabelle, and dropped on a stool at his feet, throwing off her hat, her dark masses of hair almost resting on his hands.

"Why does she? Doesn't she know I can't stand it?" thought Peter.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, Peter; you've got to let me play we are not in our bodies, but are two souls made visible, and let me show all my soul and heart to you. Do you think that Giles is in— Do you think that Giles wants to marry me? He does not, Peter. Nor would I marry him, if he did."

She looked up at Peter, her eyes dilated, her face pale, a strange smile on her lips, shrinking visibly, yet persisting.

"Peter Cassett, don't you know who I want to marry?" she said slowly.

"Isabelle! Oh, how can you do this?" Peter gasped, pushing her from him, trying to rise, remembering that he could not rise.

"Don't you love me, Peter? Giles has never said that he loved me. But you will say that you love me, your little Isabelle, won't you, Peter? And I have come to you to be loved by you, my dear, dear Peter, whom I love so dearly!" Isabelle lifted her face higher, white to its lips, but smiling at Peter, coaxing him, yet not as a woman appeals for love to the man whom she loves.

Peter threw himself forward until his face was on hers. Then he wrenched himself from her so violently that she fell backward against a chair, and Peter caught at his crutches.

"Dominico, come!" he shouted. "Help me out of this!"



## CHAPTER X.

*"I Hold You as a Thing Ensky'd and Sainted."*

**D**OMINICO came running at Peter's summons. He placed the crutches under Peter's arms, looking with curiosity, alarm and wonder at lovely Miss Chatillon, whom he profoundly admired, sitting on the low stool, leaning back against a chair, her face pale and strange, her breath coming rapidly.

"Get up, Isabelle. Take my chair. Don't leave this house. I'm going out; I'll return. I've got to see you—when I come back," Peter said hoarsely, and went away with Dominico.

"I haven't walked as far as the church; can you steer me there, Dominico?" asked Peter, when they reached the sidewalk.

"Where you want to go, there I can take you," said Dominico, and proved his vaunt true by taking Peter safely to the church.

In the church Peter could not kneel, but he managed to throw his arms over the back of a pew, with his head down upon them.

No form of prayer came to Peter's lips in set words. Over and over he prayed:

"Help me, help me! Keep me from letting her! I know; You know I know why she does this. Help me, Lord! It's harder than the other was!"

Gradually he grew quiet. Strength to bear, to renounce, came upon him, and with it a profound peace.

As, when he had first faced his lesser loss of limbs, and faith and trust had failed him for a while, when he had submitted with all his strong will, peace had come upon him as if shed from the Wounded Hands, so now when Peter laid down a greater good, turning from Isabelle to the Tabernacle with bleeding heart, peace descended upon him, a deep, cooling, profound peace, that let him arise a victor.

With Dominico's steady help Peter went home again hoping that Isabelle had waited for him. He wanted to end this now. He did not want to leave this temptation in such wise that it ever again could lift up its head to smile upon him with its allure.

"Poor little Isabelle! Sweet little Isabelle!" Peter thought, almost with a smile. "She was going to atone to him! She and Giles had arranged together that Peter should be happy at the price of the happiness of them both. My foolish darling!"

When Peter left her, Isabelle sat miserably upon the stool for a long time, her hands clasped in her lap, thinking hard. She had not deceived Peter; he had not believed that it was he, not Giles, whom she loved best. There was relief in this thought, yet an inconsistent regret. She had come to lift Peter up into happiness; all that she had done was to make everything harder for him, and all because she had not acted well her part. Isabelle was certain that if Peter could believe that she loved him better than all the world, no foolish idea that she should not marry him, now that he was a cripple, would keep him from her.

Isabelle was angry with herself for not more convincingly exaggerating the love which, in all truth, she bore Peter Cassett. Now that he had gone out

and left her to consider her failure, she began to feel that she would like beyond all things to marry Peter, to consecrate her life to enriching his.

Isabelle scrambled to her feet as she heard Mrs. Riordan coming. It would never do to let that perceptive person find her in an attitude of humility, tears in her eyes, Peter gone! She hastily dried the tears with her hand, scrambled to her feet and turned to meet the housekeeper with a sorry smile.

"Humph! All alone?" said Mrs. Riordan. "Where's himself?"

"Mr. Cassett had Dominico take him out on an errand. I'm waiting for him to come back," said Isabelle. "Isn't it good to think that he can get out, even though I've had to put off reading to him?"

"Humph!" grunted Mrs. Riordan again. "He's gaining daily. He's too healthy to miss gainin', providin' he gets a half chance. It's strange he'd be leavin' you like that. His errand must have been pressin', for he's that polite with all his nonsense an' monkey-shines he do be cuttin' up when he's himself, that he'd not be turnin' his back on a young lady, come to read to him or whatever, let alone she bein' yourself, Miss Chatillon."

"He did not tell me where he was going, nor why," said Isabelle. "We are such old friends and playmates that he is not constrained to formality with me."

"Playmates you may have been, but there's small play in it now for Peter Cassett," Mrs. Riordan said shrewdly. "I've eyes in my head Miss Chatillon, I'm goin' to speak a bit of my mind to you, an' you a motherless girl can take it in good part from me as has no daughter, but could easy be the grandmother

of yours. Let be the readin' an' the entertainin' of Peter Cassett to his friends, the Guernseys, the nice girls they are, an' Mr. Giles, that you're lovin' well, an' do you not make it worse for him by comin' here to keep your lovely face before him, an' your lovely hands within easy reach when he's tryin', like an honest man, not to covet his neighbor's wife, let alone his dearest friend's wife, even though you're not that yet, but still forbidden to him."

"Mrs. Riordan, I don't want to make it worse for Peter!" cried Isabelle. "I am fond of him; I love him dearly, and I want to help him—"

"Girl dear, did you ever hear of a man in the desert, parched an' burned for water, made easy by a passin' bird with a drop in his beak, which he dropped on 'um? Don't be foolish, girl dear, an' more by token, don't be crool, callin' it kind," remonstrated Mrs. Riordan. "It's a hard fight Peter Cassett has upon him, an' mind I'm tellin' you, it's yourself is makin' it harder! Leave the readin' to Miss Coburn, an' all of the rest of it. She's the one that would go through purgatory sayin' it was short an' chilly to her, if by doin' it she could do anything for Mr. Peter Cassett, while you——! There's no need my tellin' you who's deepest in your heart."

"Oh, Mrs. Riordan, I've thought that too!" cried Isabelle. "You think that Justine Coburn is in love with Peter?"

"Heels an' head, an' she's farther between 'um than little you!" declared Mrs. Riordan. "I'm not one to wish to see people mixin'. Miss Coburn is Protestant, or they do be sayin' her stock is black, while you're one of his own kind, an' we both know well there's but the one kind to be. But God's ways

are always best; you never can tell how a person'll be dyin', though you was in the room when they was born. There's one thing true, an' that is when you love a man you got to pray against 'um if he's a bad one, an' you'll be likely to be prayin' with him if he's the other kind. An' Peter Cassett is a young man to lead anyone right up to God, because he's got a way with him, first of all, an' he loves God with a kind of a well-acquainted-with-Him, fiery way that sets one goin' after him, an', what's maybe the biggest thing of all, he sort of runs along the rocky road to heaven, playin' with the stones on it, an' throwin' laughter at its divils sittin' along its banks trying to trip us, till he'd make you believe thrials was easy borne, an' hardships feather beds, so he would! But first an' last, Miss Coburn is ready to die for poor young Peter, an' you've no call to stand between him an' the light that's in her eyes for him."

"Mrs. Riordan, oh, Mrs. Riordan, I want only to do what is right!" cried Isabelle, not resenting the good woman's interference, but finding it hard to hear when she was in Peter's house that day but to immolate herself for Peter. "I will gladly marry him, if he——"

"Don't be riskin' the sin of that, you lovin' another man! Where's your sense, girl? Not that he'll be lettin' you—Whist, I hear the tap of his crutches!" cried Mrs. Riordan, interrupting Isabelle first, then herself, and disappearing with remarkable agility for one of her bulk in the direction from which she had come. Peter entered wearily. He dropped back into the chair which Dominico held for him, relinquishing his crutches into the young Italian's hands.

"I am glad that you waited, Isabelle. I was afraid

that you might find it too long. No, Dominico, thank you; there's not a thing I want, nothing till supper time, thanks."

Peter spoke in a low voice, with none of the ring in it that his voice usually carried; he seemed utterly weary, but Isabelle saw at once that he had regained all and more of the calmness which had been so marked in Peter since his return home. He put down a hand and fondled Canis Major's ear as the dog came to him, swinging his entire body with the violence of his tail-wagging.

"You asked me to wait for you, Peter. Of course I would wait, then!" said Isabelle.

"Of course you would, little Sister of Mercy," Peter agreed. "Dear, listen to me, and then never again let us so much as look toward this subject, not even in our separate, most secret thoughts. Let us both, Isabelle, shut the door and turn the key upon the suggestion that Peter Cassett loves you, or that you might have loved him."

"I do love you, Peter!" cried Isabelle. "Since you have been gone I have been seeing that I had not made that clear to you: I do love you! I am ready, I want to have you love me, and accept my love for you."

"All the love that you have given me I have accepted long ago, dear," said Peter quietly. "I know that you love me, but I know, also, just how much, and in what way. Tell me one thing, Isabelle: Would you have screwed your courage up to coming here to show your love for me, if it had been the real thing? Still more, if I had not been maimed and unfortunate?"

"How could I?" cried Isabelle. "Can a girl come

to a man who is big and strong, not in any way restrained from taking his own way, and—and woo him, Peter? It cost high for me to come to you as it is; otherwise, how could I?"

"Can a man who is half a man take from a girl what she offers him in pity? Can he take her almsgiving when it is herself, her whole life's happiness? Isabelle, I do not deserve that you should think so poorly of me," cried Peter.

"Pride is a miserable thing when such great matters are at stake!" Isabelle spoke so fervently that Peter looked at her, half wondering if there could be love for him in her heart after all.

"Isabelle," he said slowly, watching her face intently because of this sudden question arising, "pride is a poor thing, it is a wicked thing, when it comes between two people who are everything to each other. But self-respect is not a poor thing, nor is it pride. If you loved me, dear, as—as you love Giles—" Peter hesitated, waiting, but Isabelle also waited, and did not contradict him.

"If you loved me as you love Giles, as I love you—Yes, this one time, at its burial, I will say that!" Peter continued still more slowly. "For I love you, Isabelle, with all the powers of my mind and soul; I love you with all the habit of my entire life of conscious thought. Not one cell of my big body is more truly built up into its fibre than is the love of you. We were children when I began to love you better than anything else in the world, and from that boyhood adoration has developed a man's absorbing love and longing. Never while I live can anyone else fill your place in my life, Isabelle, but yet I shall cease to love you like this when you are Giles' wife.

For I know that God and the sacraments will enable me to master this sort of love for another man's wife, and that man my old Giles! But if you had loved me like this—I never meant to tell you how I loved you, Isabelle, but since you have done what you have done, out of your generosity to me, out of your pity that longs to comfort me, even out of a real affection for me, I think I owe it to you to requite that generosity by telling you that you made no mistake in thinking that I loved and needed you, that I love you as you can hardly measure. But—again—if you had loved me like this,—and you do not, oh, Isa, you do not!—I would not have refused to accept your pity, your richest gifts, though I were a lame beggar on the steps of St. Peter's! I would be glad that you could give to me, earning God's gifts by your devotion to one of His most wretched ones. I'd hold up my hands, though I were blind, as well as lame, begging my bread, hold them up for more and still more of all that you could pour into them, glad to be nothing, as long as you loved me! But when you do not love me in this way, dear, then it is not for me. And could I forget Giles? Should I forget him, if I could? Go to Giles, Isabelle, and forget Peter, this Peter, revealed to you to-day. Pray for the other Peter, the one for whom you have a deep affection, never forget him, and, as the years go by let him be your best friend, as he has always been your future husband's chum. I am sure that I shall be happy. I don't see how I can be joyous, but peace and happiness are going to be mine, I know. And I half hope that I may be of some use in the world. Of course not in the way I used to dream of being, but not ut-



terly worthless as I thought I'd be for a while—at first, you know.”

Peter let his head sink back against his chair, and closed his eyes as if he had exhausted himself physically in laying before Isabelle his heart unbarred.

Isabelle stood as she had been standing when Peter entered, her back against the light, her hands behind her clasping the window sill. She had not moved, nor attempted to speak for a long time, since Peter had begun to show her what he had not meant to show her, what her mistaken impulse to help had drawn from him. Her eyes were on his face, her lips parted, her breath did not stir the thin folds of the collar of her blouse, fastened low at the base of her slender throat. It was as if she saw a vision and were listening intently to words from a land which she had never known. She loved Giles dearly, but suffering had not sharpened that love into the passion of longing which thrilled in Peter's low voice. Her love was a young, a happy thing; and Giles had never spoken of love to her. Isabelle was fast learning what depths love could sound, and the revelation awed her beyond consciousness that she was concerned in it, far beyond her facile readiness to attempt to heal its pain.

“Thank you, Peter, for trusting me. I am sorry, oh, I am sorry, Peter! You are tired. I hope you may rest. I will go. Good-bye. I am sorry, Peter, dear, dear, Peter the Great!” Isabelle said at last.

Peter opened his eyes, and straightened himself.

“Don't be sorry, little Isabelle! That is what I especially don't want you to be. Hark! Giles is coming; he is here. He'll take you home,” he said.

Giles came in rapidly, but checked himself as he

crossed the doorway, arrested by Isabelle's white, distressed face, by Peter's look of utter weariness.

"Anything worse with you, Hermit?" he said. "You're not—you're all right?"

Peter made an effort; he said briskly:

"Well, not quite all right, but nothing worth minding. I took my first walk in the street, and it rather knocked me out. I'm dog tired; that's all. You see, you can't help feeling that the crutch tips are going to catch on something, and you'll go sprawling. Then you realize that if the crutches do fly out you won't land on your feet, for—what was it Penrod always said? 'For the main and simple reason' that there aren't any down below you! Queer feeling, but I'll get used to it. It's the first step that costs, or the first several! Don't look so worried, Monk! Didn't we know how it would have to be? Say, you Monk, you Trappist monk, why didn't you talk, talk to me, tell me about the office and getting started? You're a nice one!"

"I sort of waited——" Giles hesitated.

"Afraid I'd see green; envy and other deadly sins, I suppose! Say, Monk, the next time you don't let a poor old cripple in for good news, when he's cut off from even bad news, and any especial rejoicings, you and I part company, part partnership. What do you think I am?" Peter demanded.

"It wasn't that I didn't know you'd be glad," began Giles, but Peter interrupted him.

"Cut it out! Cut-it-out! When pals have to explain—well, it doubles the finals and they become palls! Going to build a cathedral, Giles?" cried Peter.

"Going to build a fine little church, I want you to

know!" cried Giles, rising to Peter's bait. "Snug little thing, and original. Priest's house sort of growing on it, and out of it, to one side! Do you know the idea, the design of it came to me in a dream? Fact!"

"'Oh, let me dream again,'" Peter hummed the words. "I'm as set up about it as you are. And I'm going into business myself! With Coburn, Owen and Fitts! You may well stare! Justin Coburn waited on me at my residence and wrenched me away from all competitors for my hand! Say, Giles, don't waste time on that; it may or may not be a go, but honest truth, I'm starting in Monday week. Monk, why not let me drop the idea of artificial limbs, and you design me a cozy little one-story house on wheels to get about in? I wasn't keen about walking the streets when I tried it to-day, that's straight."

"I'll build you a sky-scraper, Hermit, worked from the top of the roof, so you can command the view while you perambulate," said Giles, helping Peter on, but feeling that if he were alone he'd be in danger of tears.

"Build a house for you and Isabelle. Get a nice bit of ground, and plan a house which shall make all the Woodcocks bristle with envy, till they're ruffled grouse." Peter looked hard at Giles as he spoke, and Giles restrained himself from asking the question which leaped to his lips. But he glanced questioningly at Isabelle.

"Queer you say that, even though you are fooling," said Giles groping through his uncertainty. "Have you heard that they were laying out dandy links beyond the river, are bridging the river with a broad bridge, unornamental, but consequently im-

pressive, and are selling lots for suburban residences out there? They're going to call it Woodcock Links. Father bought four lots out there, and presented me with them. They'll jump in value fast, and that will be a pretty nice place in summer; a little closed car would make it all right in winter."

"Well, for heat commend me to a river bank on a hot day!" said Peter. "But I don't want to disparage it. No, I hadn't heard about it; sounds fine. I'm only grouching because, as you rightly diagnosed me, I'm an envious cuss. In the bottom of my heart, Monk, I'm glad. That's going some! Architect with a house and lot! No; only the house, I mean the lot, but the architect makes the house easy. Good news, old chap! Honest, it does me good. Will you build a room for Peter the Hermit in your house? Then he won't be a hermit so that you'll notice it! He'll sponge on you half the time!"

"Peter is dreadfully tired, Giles," said Isabelle, coming forward. "I must go."

"Then *we* must go!" cried Giles. "All right, aren't you, Hermit?"

"Surely! Don't I tell you so? But Isabelle is right; I'm pretty tired, knocked out, nearly! Queer, but this thing has taken some of my strength. Isabelle didn't get any reading done to me! Till next time, little Isabelle! Good-bye, though, and sometimes good-bye means no next time, doesn't it?" said Peter, almost wildly.

"Make it good night, then," suggested Giles, but he looked anxiously at Isabelle, as Peter lay back and closed his eyes like one at the end of his strength.

Giles telegraphed to Isabelle the inquiry "Shall we stay?"

Isabelle shook her head. "Good night, Peter," she said softly, and Peter opened his eyes to smile at her.

"Good night to you and Giles; good-bye, Isabelle," he said,

## CHAPTER XI.

*"I Am Not Merry; but I Do Beguile the Thing I Am  
by Seeming Otherwise."*

A LONG time Peter sat as Isabelle and Giles had left him, his head tipped back against his chair, his eyes closed, his face white and exhausted, his lips parted as if he were enduring physical pain.

Thus Father Coigne found him when he dropped in to see how matters went with his Peter the Great, for whom his heart ached and whom he longed at all times to comfort. The twilight had deepened into the early darkness of the season; although it was but the middle of November, and winter had showed no symptoms of setting in, yet was the sun preparing the way for it by dropping down behind Woodcock's encircling hills early, according to his mid-November schedule.

"I think he is asleep, Father," said Dominico. "I looked in lots of times but he has not moved. He went for a walk, to the church. It did make him tired. But, Father, why did he go?"

Father Coigne smiled at Dominico. "Peter has the habit of making visits there," he suggested.

Dominico spread his eloquent hands with an indescribable movement of his fingers which expressed the inadequacy of the priest's explanation, and Dominico's doubt of it. All but six months of the boy's life had been spent in the United States; his tongue had learned English well, but his hands talked after the Italian manner, and made any spoken lan-

guage seem superfluous.

"Then why did he go so sudden? Is it polite to leave a lady, a young lady, a lady as beautiful as a saint in the church, who was calling on him, alone, while he went to pay a visit to the church?" cried Dominico rapidly, excited because to him the actions of Peter, his welfare, had become supremely important. "I have learned from Mr. Peter Cassett all about visiting Our Lord when the red light is afire, but though I now know that is good to do, there is a time, Father! And does not Our Lord like politeness to a beau-ti-ful girl?" Dominico once more waved his hands, this time as if throwing into the air a problem that must be seized and solved by higher intelligences than his, which might be hovering above him.

"Ah!" exclaimed Father Coigne. "Is that what Mr. Peter did? Well, it sounds rude, Dominico, but knowing Peter, I know that it could not have been so; he had an excellent reason. I've no doubt. So he had a caller?"

"Two!" Dominico held up a long first finger, then swiftly the other long first finger on the other hand. "First, the beautiful Miss Isabelle. Then, after he had come back from the church and had long talked to her softly, quietly, Mr. Giles."

"The walk to the church and back again was too much for him. Miss Isabelle and Mr. Giles never tire him; they are his oldest, nearest friends. I'll slip in and see if he is awake. I'll not disturb him if he isn't; don't be anxious, my fine Dominico!" So saying, the little priest softly turned and stole into Peter's sitting room.

"I'm not asleep, Father," said Peter, lifting him-

self by the arms of his chair into an erect position. "Dominico has been peeping in on me and I let him think I was off, but I've not been."

"You're tired, Peter the Great," said Father Coigne, pulling a chair up close to Peter. "Dominico tells me that you walked to and from the church! You promised to go easy when you began!"

"I know. It's that very thing that a fellow can't do—go easy. Why don't you turn on the light, Father?" asked Peter.

"If it doesn't bother you," assented the priest, "this softer one, then."

He arose and pulled the chain of the electric reading lamp, with its softly opalescent shade that cast a pleasant glow around the room, but had no glare.

"Now, then, Peter, my boy, what's wrong with you?" Father Coigne resumed his chair and reached over to touch Peter's hand.

Peter's fingers closed over the thin hand that had been consecrated to forgive, to sacrifice, and by the priest's own soul had been consecrated to help in lesser ills than those of soul.

"Father, I've had a tussle," Peter said almost in a whisper. "What would you say if I told you that Isabelle—*Isabelle!*—came here to-day, sat on that stool, almost with her head upon my knee, looking up at me, smiling at me, trying to make me believe that it was I she loved, and telling me that it was surely I that she wanted to marry. What would you say?"

"I would say that you had to be Peter the Great, indeed! And I would say that it would be hard to equal the cruel consequences which come from the folly of an idealistic, self-sacrificing, nobly good and enthusiastic girl! To think that Isabelle Chatillon—



She is such a sensible girl! My poor Peter! What did you do?" asked the priest.

"I—Oh, I don't know! I told her that I knew that she loved me, but not as she loved Giles, I refused to listen—to listen to Isabelle offering to devote her life to me! But she sat just here, so close to me, so sweet! And I've been in hell time and again this long while when I realized afresh it was Giles, not me! I was near the danger line! I almost took her, Father! Then I called Dominico and hustled to the church. I told Isabelle to wait for me; she did. Then when I got back we settled it forever. I don't want anything like that again! Giles came. She went off with Giles. They'll be married—I hope soon." Peter stopped speaking and passed his hand across his forehead. "It's a man-sized job to go through with. It's warm here, isn't it?"

Father Coigne patted Peter's hand without speaking for a long time, then he said:

"I'm sorry, Peter the Great. It is a man-sized job. Thank God you're made the size of a man; you measure right up, my Peter! Isabelle is a dear girl, and she is capable of any amount of enthusiasm; she'd be happy, in a sense, in being unhappy, if it were for a cause. She would not have been unhappy with you, Peter. There is no reason why a woman would not love you. I've seen many a sound man unfit to lean on, but you'd be a complete man, my boy, if you'd lost all your body but your head, I am tempted to believe! Isabelle is fond of you, exceedingly fond of you; many of the happiest marriages are founded upon this sort of love, rather than mere attraction."

"Are you tempting me, Father? Don't you re-

member Giles?" cried Peter.

"Surely I remember him! And I'm not tempting you. You have done the only right, upright—right, thing! But I don't want you to feel as if you were a maimed cripple, whom no woman could regard except with pity and to whom she could give nothing but an alms, because that's not only false, but it's bad for you. Any woman might well love you and be proud of you, Peter the Great, and be charmed with you, which is the thing that counts largely, after all. You've a way with you, Peter Cassett, and you loom up big along about this time!" Father Coigne declared heatedly.

Peter laughed. "It's not your place to sow me full of vanity, Father Gregory Coigne!" he cried, almost gaily, feeling bound to play up to the stimulus which he knew that the priest was trying to administer to him. "I'll put a pink bow on one of my sticks, and a blue bow on the other, and I'll go down in the shopping district about eleven every morning, letting the pretty girls look at me, and I'll smile at some of them with that way of mine, and I'll have every dainty little Woodcock hen with a broken wing—or is it heart?—warbling plaintively to the setting sun by night."

"Do it, and I'll put you in sackcloth and ashes, saying penances as long as from here to the river for sins of—Now which deadly sin would that be? Pride? No; it's more like vanity! And it surely would not be sloth! We'll call it gluttony and let it go at that." Father Coigne joined in Peter's laugh, greatly relieved to find Peter closing the chapter of his tragedy and voluntarily turning to comedy, which, though not especially amusing, would serve

its end.

"Say, Peter, I came here to ask a favor," Father Coigne went on. "I've a baseball match on for tomorrow afternoon, my fifth and sixth grade boys, against my eighth and that supplementary year I've put in for the benefit of those who can't, or won't go on with High School work—my parochial, you know! The boys have an awe of big Peter Cassett, and his athletics, that words could not state! Will you come over and watch 'em? Cheer them along, you know; give them encouragement? It would be doing me a good turn, and a big one for the lads, if you would."

"You're a will-o'-the-wisp, Father! You're luring me on with your lantern of good works, yet expect me not to see by it! Good turn to the boys and you! Not me?" Peter hinted.

"It won't harm you, that's sure; I'd like to see you taking your usual interest in things, of course," said the priest with a fine air of candor. "But it would do exactly what I say for my lads. And you know, Peter, that Roscoe Fitts and J. Wesley Owen are doing their prettiest to make the public school teams right up to snuff, and the Y. M. C. A. with its swimming pool, and its gym and its team games—and also with its substituting of muscles for spirit, is giving me something to do to keep the boys contented in St. John's School, so it's the gospel truth that anyone that can make us attractive to them is doing something worth while. J. Wesley and Fitts are Y. M. C. A. all over and then some! And they do spend for it!"

"I'm going to work for J. Wesley Owen and Roscoe Fitts on Monday, the twenty-first," announced

Peter.

"Is—that—so!" cried Father Coigne, truly surprised. "Well, now that is news! Good for you, Peter!

He beamed on Peter proudly. It was no small satisfaction to begin a conversation as this one had begun, and find it ending in the announcement that Peter was going to attempt to take a place in the world among men.

"It is really Mr. Coburn for whom I'm to work. He came here to ask me to try it. He had an idea of asking me before—this—" Peter pointed downward to his deficiency. "I've a suspicion that his partners opposed him, but now he has got them to consent. Perhaps they're actuated by pity! At any rate I'm going to try it: it easily may not work out well. And, Father, about to-morrow and the game. Justine Coburn has asked me to go over with her in her new little roadster—some roadster, by the way! Her father doesn't count pennies spent on Justine!—to the Claw. I'm to get in with some of those Italian kids whom the meeting houses are trying to steal. They've got a club for them. And Justine—She'll do, Father! She's a good sport, and she can see the other fellow's point of view, no matter how opposite to her own it may be; I like Justine Coburn; she's straight! Justine said: 'I'll take you over to the Claw, and you shall say or do anything you like to those Italians.' So, I'm going, with her, too."

"Good work, Peter," said Father Coigne, but he looked at Peter thoughtfully, speculation in his eye. "Good work, but I confess I don't get it. You are going to work for Justin Coburn, and Justine Coburn takes you over to undo what her father

spends freely to establish? And she is the apple of his eye, and the girl of all the ones in town who 'labor for the Americanization of the immigrant,'—that's the proper way to put it, I believe—is the most zealous and the most efficient! Or she was. What does this mean, Peter? Justine Coburn isn't turning toward the Church, is she?"

"No, oh, no," replied Peter. "She hasn't any faith; she calls herself an agnostic, yet there's no mistake about it, she can't quite bring herself to reject Our Lord—curious how they call Him 'Christ,' as if they were ashamed, or maybe afraid to let Him come too close! I told her that she could tear down among the Italians, not give them another faith, and she admitted, rather sadly, that she had none to give. So I asked her as a personal favor to let those people alone till she had thought out carefully what she was doing in robbing them of their faith, and she agreed to do that. Justine would keep her word in the face of wild beasts! She'd have been glorious in the Coliseum! I believe she must be seeing that it's a shame to use wealth to rob people; I know she's keenly alive to her own poverty. You know she put me wise to Dominico, and he's turning out a pious Italian son of the Church. Now she's going to take me to the Claw to see for myself, and to use my own claws, so to speak, if I want to. It's a queer go, I think myself, but that kind of honesty and independence is exactly like Justine. Probably she also agrees with you, Father, and thinks it's good for me to have an interest."

"H'm," murmured Father Coigne, then seeing that the thought in his own mind had no place in Peter's, and with a rapid forecast of a possible future

in which the working out of that thought might be an excellent thing, he said, "Well, Peter, there's one thing certain, we never should be surprised, although we invariably are, with the unlikely things that happen. Your sketch of Justine Coburn gives the image of a fine girl, one capable of thinking and acting for herself. By all means go with her to the Claw. There's no telling what may come of it. Lucky for her, poor child, that she has a friend, who is rejoicing in his faith, to turn to in her darkness. Maybe, Peter, that's what this trouble has come to you for, to enable you to show the less fortunate than you what a happy boy you are on your crutches! And now there's no saying what may happen, either, if I don't get home! Cousin Rose is patient with me, but it takes it all when I keep her dinner waiting! Poor Rose! And it is a dinner that it would be a shame to spoil, that Rose invariably gives me! Then I'm not to have you at my ball game?"

"Well, you see, Father—" began Peter.

"Yes, of course; a prior engagement! But I'll tell you what, Peter, if you could come the next day, I'd put off the game!" cried Father Coigne. "The boys are eager for the fray, but I know they'd wait to get you to see it and, maybe, coach them a bit afterward. Will you come the next day?"

"Surest thing in the world I'll come, if it's worth your while holding it up for me!" cried Peter with a zest that promised well for Father Coigne's scheme to rehabilitate him. "I've a twist I learned from a professional who turned up at college once that would put out every man jack of the other school teams, if I could get it into your boys' heads—and arms!"

"Try it, Peter!" cried Father Coigne. "St. John's seniors are going to play the High School teams at Thanksgiving. Could you teach it to them by then?"

"Oh, I don't know! It takes practise." Peter shook his head doubtfully. "I could teach it sitting down, though."

"That's a good thing," said the priest easily, as if the fact that Peter could not stand to teach was nothing that particularly mattered. "I'll tell you, Peter! Ask Miss Coburn to come with you to the ball game. That's returning the compliment, after she takes you to the Claw! I'll send a car for you, and you can fetch her."

"Oh, as to the car, Justine would use her own; she seems to want like everything to get me out in it. Nice girl! I'm grateful to her. I'll ask her to the kids' game; I'll bet she'll be glad to come," said Peter.

"Then I'll say good-bye and consider that settled; let me know if you can't get there," said Father Coigne, rising to go. "And I hope Miss Coburn will come along. I'd like to see what she's like who 'wants like everything to get Peter out in her car,' and is ready to give up her Italian antics because he asks it!" he added to himself, as he closed the outer door behind him.

It was true, as Peter had said, that Mr. Coburn did not count pennies when he was spending on Justine. The next afternoon when she drove up to Peter's door in her shining new roadster a glance sufficed to show that it was a roadster worthy to be driven by a Princess Royal.

With Dominico's arms to support him, Peter man-

aged the getting in quite well, but Justine bit her lip to keep back the tears that filled her eyes as they rested upon Peter's noble head and broad shoulders, and saw him struggling to swing his maimed body into her car.

"Dominico, come with us. Mr. Cassett may want to walk about," said Justine in her quick, decisive way. "Can't you stand on the running board?"

"Why not, Miss Coburn?" asked Dominico, jumping up without delaying for the hat rendered superfluous by his thick mass of waving black hair. "I would be glad to see my friends in the Claw, and I could tell them some things myself now, in Italian, to the mothers. Mr. Cassett learned me."

Justine laughed. "Such a change in Dominico! He was ready to agree to my statement that the sun shone by night, the moon by day till now! But I carried a potent argument! Tell the mothers anything you please, Dominico; I do not mind. But remember, it was I who sent you to Mr. Cassett to be made a saint, if that is what you feel coming on you!"

Justine threw over her gears, and the roadster bounded out from the curb and started down the street, at a speed that threatened Dominico's hold on the running board.

"You are a strange girl, Justine. You seem older than you are. You and I are not the same age, I am your elder by—"

"Two years plus," said Justine. "It is partly because I am so tall and thin. It is the small, pretty girl who is youthful, just as she is winsome, attractive, lovable—" Justine checked herself.

"Oh, I don't know! There have been tall women who have set their world afire. I don't think of



Helen as small. Mary Stuart was fully medium height, and—"

"And they don't matter a great deal now, do they?" cried Justine. "Tall and short, lean and plump, pretty and plain, 'get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor must she come.' I lack poor Yorick's skull to make the application of that *this*, but please supply it, Peter. We're all dead soon, or perhaps sooner, and then it doesn't matter."

"Justine, how bitter you can be!" cried Peter shocked. "It's no wonder you seem older than you are! You don't look for this sort of philosophy, and Hamlet, from a girl!"

"I like Shakespeare better by far than I do the novels which the girls I know read, and as to philosophy, I have eyes to see, Peter! It doesn't matter when we're dead, but, oh, it does matter while we live! And it makes it worse that we die so soon! That's precisely why it is abominable to cheat us out of that little hour! The butterflies and moths have but an hour, but they are secure of theirs!" cried Justine.

"What do you want, Justine dear?" asked Peter gently.

Justine looked at him curiously, then she laughed.

"That is just the question, Peter dear!" she mocked him. "If I think I want something I am far from sure that, if I got it, I should be satisfied. I want nothing, perhaps; everything, I'm sure!"

"You do indeed, Justine!" said Peter with swift perception. "You want everything, Infinity, for which you were created. Nothing that ends will ever fill you."

"My heavens, Peter Cassett, what a speech from a young man like you! But no one has ever told me anything half so true! It is concrete truth!" Justine said, speaking low, with a sort of amazed fire.

She was a strange girl! Peter did not know what to make of her. He felt a submerged understanding of her that made him like to be with her, like her personally and a great deal. But with this was a feeling of something that he did not understand, from which he shrank, and this prevented him from giving Justine the affection that all that he knew of her told him that she deserved.

She was clever; she was sincere; she was devoted, fine, noble, all this Peter told himself of Justine. Yet she was mocking, "unwomanly"; he fell back triumphantly upon this elastic term that has been the undoing of so many a clever woman.

Yet, arrived at the Woodcock's Claw, among the poor Italians, Peter almost had to revise that opinion.

The children swarmed around her, looking up at her, adoring her with their beautiful dark eyes, and Peter saw at once it was not solely for the gifts that she brought them. She gathered them, one after another into her lap, and held them there, her limpid lovely grey eyes so full of maternal love.

"Tell them, Peter, all about it; tell these older ones," Justine said. "They know you and how you were hurt. Tell them, if you want to, what your faith, that I tried to take from them, means to you, and not to trust us, but to hold it. Tell them, Peter! I brought you here for that. I want to hear you say it. I want to hear you say it! I want to know if you will teach that to these boys and girls; not only to me who have critical intelligence."

It was a hard demand to be made upon an American young man, by a girl, before so many sharp young eyes, watching him, wondering, but Peter knew that it must be done. With entire simplicity, but with a quiet fervor that made every word count, Peter talked to these young immigrants from their Catholic land of what the Old Faith was, why it must be held at all cost, who it was that from the Tabernacle upheld him, now that he could no longer walk, nor stand.

Justine arose as Peter finished his story—he had made it almost into the form of a story—and set down the little fawn-eyed child whom, at that moment, she happened to be holding. She said:

"You have told them! You have undone, or you should have undone, all the harm I did them. And I have heard you tell them! I know now that you mean all that you say to me, and more! You talk to them differently than to me, the outsider who has no faith, no claim on your mysteries. Is that atonement, Peter? Have I atoned a little? I will harm them no more, never; I promise it! Come home, Peter; are you ready?"

"Quite ready, Justine. You needed no atonement, for you never meant to do harm," said Peter, puzzled by the suppressed emotion in her voice and face, and inexpressibly touched by it.

"Kind Peter! Shall we go? Good-bye, happy little fawn-children! And I suppose Dominico has told the mothers! He has been talking fast with hands and tongue. Come, Dominico; we are going!" called Justine.

Dominico came running, helped Peter into the car, while his mother and her sister wiped from their

eyes with their gaudy aprons, the tears which had filled them because of what Dominico had been telling them of brave Peter. Then he jumped upon the running board once more, and Justine, waving one hand backward to the children, but not looking around, drove away.

## CHAPTER XII.

*"That Which Ordinary Men Are Fit for, I Am Qualified In."*

**J**USTINE had readily, even gladly accepted Peter's suggestion that she should go with him to see Father Coigne's ball match.

"I'll be around to your house early, Peter," she had said, and proved as good as her word.

"Do you mind if Dominico rides over on your running board?" Peter asked as Dominico came out with him to the roadster.

Then, when they were off, Peter added: "I don't need Dominico; there'll be plenty to help me over there, but Dominico likes to go where I do, and it's a pity to cut off any of the small pleasures which are easily given."

"Did you think I'd mind his going, Peter?" Justine asked reproachfully. "I wish you would regard this little car as yours, and me as your chauffeur. That's what would give me a big pleasure, not one of the small ones, yet it is as easily given!"

"Well, I don't know about that!" laughed Peter. "It wouldn't be altogether easy to look on Justine Coburn as my chauffeur. However, I do truly appreciate that, Justine, and I promise to ask you to help me out, if I get a hankering for a place which is now beyond my reach."

"Will the priest—will Father Coigne be at the game?" asked Justine.

"Well, rather!" cried Peter. "The kids wouldn't

consider a home run worth a cheer unless Father saw it!"

Justine's clear eyes regarded Peter thoughtfully.

"These children are so much attached to him? Just as you are?" she said.

"Why, yes; they're his boys," returned Peter. "It's different with me; it's more as I was with old Father Whittle; I was one of his boys. Father Coigne found me grown up; but unless one of these small chaps has occasion to need his friendship as I do—which heaven forbid!—I don't know how he'll ever be to one of them what he is to me."

"I see that he is," said Justine slowly, answering Peter's meaning more exactly than its form. "I shall not have to meet him, shall I?"

"Mercy, yes; of course you will! Don't you want to meet him?" cried Peter. Justine shook her head hard, and said: "I never spoke to a priest. I should not know how to talk to him."

"That's funny, Justine! You're on committees and dear knows what-all! Father Coigne is the same as any other man to talk to, only easier, and out of sight nicer; what makes you shy?" Peter laughed.

"I'm not in the least shy, but I'm priest-shy," declared Justine. "There's something—I'm sure I can't explain it. Perhaps it's because they claim such powers for themselves?"

"More likely it is because they possess the powers which they claim, Justine. You feel in them the supernatural gifts of ordination."

Now, in Peter, it made Justine realize that, though he had been her playmate in childhood, her comrade since, Peter's mind and hers never met on

many important points; that Peter moved and breathed in an atmosphere beyond her comprehension.

Justine found on arriving at the ball grounds that she might drive her roadster in through a fair-sized gate and leave it within the enclosure, while she was expected to seat herself among the spectators who were, for the most part, young sisters and cousins and friends of the players. Father Coigne had secured good athletic grounds for his parochial school; it had a regulation-sized ball ground, and the goals for basket ball on one side showed that it was not only baseball which the pupils played. Among the girls on the benches, in the best places in the middle, sat three women in loose straight-falling garments, with deep linen collars over them, their faces framed in linen, black veils blowing out in the stiff breeze from their curious head-covering. These women had faces which were totally unlike in feature, but wonderfully alike in an expression of profound peace, together with a childish eagerness, an alert curiosity that took no pose of indifference to events, even the unexciting event of a ball game between young pupils of the same school. One of the women was almost elderly; her face was beginning to acquire lines, but her eyes were the most alight of any of them, her smile was the sweetest and the sunniest; she leaned forward to see better, and she laughed aloud delightedly and poked a young girl beside her when a boy out in the field, at practise, made a leap in the air and caught a high fly that was sailing over centrefield into outer space. The three women for the most part kept their hands tucked away in their ample sleeves; when they drew one out it was

banded with linen, like their heads, and the band confined a full white sleeve.

"Who are they? What are they? Can they be nuns?" asked Justine, clutching Peter's sleeve eagerly as they sat for a few moments in the car, surveying the scene.

"Where? Oh, I see! No, they aren't nuns exactly, but they are Religious, Sisters, you know. They teach in the parochial school, and these three have come to see the game, to show their interest in it. That oldest one is Sister Nicola; she taught me. She's a peach if ever there was one; just as good and kind as she can be, and she loves a game, but it would be hard to find a more spiritual woman. Her heart is like a child's; she's one of those of whom the kingdom of heaven is made up, full of happy play because her soul is like a crystal that reflects God," said Peter.

"Religious! Not nuns? Sisters? I don't understand," said Justine. "Do they take a vow?"

"Three of them!" said Peter. "Here comes Father Coigne."

Father Gregory Coigne came across the athletic ground, his hat in his hand, his face wreathed in smiles. It was a beautiful face, Justine saw at once; ascetic, weary, but sunny, with the keenest, yet the kindest eyes that could light a face.

"Hallo, Peter the Great!" called the priest before he reached them.

"Hallo, Pater Gregorius!" retorted Peter. "Please, Father, let me introduce to you Miss Justine Coburn."

"Glad to meet Miss Coburn," said Father Coigne clasping Justine's hand heartily. "You've done a lot



for Peter, and that puts me in your debt, because Peter—well, he's my Peter the Great!"

A bright blush ran quickly up from Justine's throat to her hair; her plain, clever face seemed to smile in its texture, with the smile on her strong, well-cut mouth, and her truly wonderful eyes flashed a glance of downright liking on the priest.

"H'm!" thought the priest. "Ready to like me if I like Peter! Noble face!"

"Nobody owes me anything for what I do for Peter, providing I do anything for him, which I don't admit. Peter's an old chum, and he does more for me—" she stopped herself hastily.

"She sure does!" Peter answered to Father Coigne's statement. "Say, Father, what do you think? Suppose I pitch an inning, or the whole game! I've been thinking I could do it if I sat on a box or something. I'd be—or I could be so fixed I'd be—about the same height as the kids, and I'll bet they'd like it."

"Well, Peter!" cried Justine, but her face glowed with pride in him, and the look that she involuntarily exchanged with the priest scotched all possible reservation which might have withheld her from accepting him.

"You old sport!" said Father Coigne affectionately. "The boys would be beside themselves. Try it; I'm sure we can make a go of it. Come along over to the shack where we keep the bats, and also the boys when they're gathering, Miss Coburn, while we offer them our pitcher. I'm not going to let you go over there on the benches; I'm going to see that you're properly coached to appreciate our game, so I'll keep you as my guest, under my wing."

Justine sprang out on her side of the car, her slenderness easily slipping out under the steering wheel. Dominico held Peter's crutches, and Peter swung forward, took them, placed them, and started out with Father Coigne at his side on the one hand, Justine on the other, Dominico anxiously close in the rear; they went over to find the boys.

It was not necessary to look for them. Twenty-five boys gathered around the door of the house in which their lockers were built, silently watching Peter's approach. At the same time the little girls and the Sisters on the benches lost all interest in everything else as they saw and recognized Peter.

"Well, God bless and help him!" exclaimed Sister Nicola aloud. "It's my poor, poor Peter Cassett! Never did I teach a greater scamp, nor a dearer one! All the mischief he could do was his limit, no less! But never a lie would he tell, nor a sneaking trick would he do, and I could trust him forever. Though it's true that I could also depend upon him to upset the schoolroom! Full of life, running, jumping, tearing his clothes! Oh, and now look at him! Crutches, and both his blessed strong little legs amputated! And once how he ran away from me on them! Oh, Sister Madeleine and Sister Stanislaus, my dears, you're too young, too lately sent here to realize what you're seeing! May God give him graces to make up to him for all that he suffers, my poor little Peter!"

"Say, fellers, it's Peter Cassett, that's who 'tis; the one what won the races for St. John's! Oh, say, fellers!" said the captain of the senior ball team, speaking low, and intensely, and his brief sentence meant exactly what Sister Nicola's voluble lamenta-

tion conveyed.

"Here's Peter Cassett, boys!" called Father Coigne as they approached. "You all know Peter Cassett, at least by reputation! What do you think? He's offered to pitch for one side in this game! You're to hustle around and get him a box to sit on, and he will pitch for us! He knows a twist that he'll show you in this game, and teach you another time, he told me! How's that?"

"Fine!" said the captain of the seniors. "But, Father, the side he pitches for'll have a cinch. Would that be square? It's just us fellers now, you see."

"Well, aren't you big chaps going to have the best of the little ones? Why not let Peter pitch for the juniors? I'll tell you! Let Peter pitch for both sides! What difference does it make that it's the same pitcher, just between ourselves? It will be the fielding that wins in that case, and nobody else will be in on that. Could you keep it up nine innings, eighteen, pitching, Peter? In case we require nine innings? I think we'll end it in seven. Then you boys will have a chance to field and play bases with a real pitcher on both sides. It will be good training for you." Father Coigne proposed his singular plan with such apparent sincerity and enthusiasm that the boys accepted it with acclaim.

"That's a go, Father!" cried some of them. "Gee, think of playin' with Peter Cassett in the box!" added the elder captain.

Justine saw that the priest was eager to get Peter into the game; she knew that it was for Peter's sake, not for his boys, that he wanted Peter to pitch, and while Father Coigne headed his satellites in a still hunt for a box on which Peter might sit, she stood

waiting with Peter and Dominico, watching the priest's slender figure moving alertly about, and felt her heart go out to him. She did not miss, being quick to perceive, the complete confidence, the intimate affection which was in the manner of the least of the boys toward Father Coigne, just as it was in Peter's manner to him. They all were perfectly free with him, showed no fear of him, yet in this there was a respect that struck Justine as marvellous, combined with the freedom. And they all went to confession to him, and told him into what they had fallen! Among the older boys there were many to whom this must be an ordeal, and Peter was a grown man! Yet they all clustered around this priest, fearlessly, without embarrassment looking up into his eyes, the eyes to which they bared the secrets which no Protestant would share with his mother! Justine recognized this, but could not explain it; she tucked it away in her mind, to be thought out in her room that night.

The box for Peter was found. Dominico helped him off with his coat; Justine took it and folded it upon her arm. Softly she picked from it a few bits of straw that had adhered to it, touching it with lingering fingers. She looked up and met Father Coigne's eyes gently watching her. She looked into them confirming his thought, not at all minding that he was reading her. Unafraid, truthfully, she confessed herself to this stranger, she who had dreaded a Catholic priest! It was only afterward that Justine realized that, though she might not be able to explain it, she had instinctively grasped the attitude of these people to their confessor.

Dominico took Peter out to the diamond and

helped him to seat himself on the box. Father Coigne and Justine lingered to watch him pitch for both halves of the first, and the first half of the second innings. Then Father Coigne turned to Justine, and said:

"He has come into his own again! He's pitching splendidly, and with delight. It's a godsend that you brought him here and he got into the game, Miss Coburn! Shall we walk a bit? This side is not sheltered, and is out of the sun. Peter is all right till after the game is over, and with him to pitch on both sides it may last less than seven innings, and may need twelve to finish! You are a good friend to my poor boy to try to get him out and interested in life!"

"Oh, Mr. Coi—Father Coigne," Justine corrected herself with a blush. "It has been past bearing that Peter is crippled! Splendid Peter! I've been heartsick over it, and afraid for Peter."

"Heartsick you well may be, but afraid for Peter, no! Peter is all right. I'd be Peter Cassett any time rather than thousands of sound men," said Father Coigne. "If I were asked who was the most to be envied of any man I know—well, outside a few Religious of my acquaintance who are far upon the heavenly way—I'd say young Cassett!"

Justine did not answer. She walked beside Father Coigne with her eyes cast down, thoughtful, frowning slightly. Then she looked up suddenly, and said:

"That is because you think this world doesn't matter. Now I think it's the only thing that we actually know does matter. You can't know anything, not to *know* it, that you haven't seen. It's all a matter of opinion."

"Well, my dear, if it were a matter of opinion only, it's my honest opinion that we should be bad enough off to make Peter's loss tragic indeed! But you see it is not a matter of opinion; it is actual knowledge, based on authority, and that Authority created all things, so you must admit is in an excellent position to know about it! And as to knowing only what you see, my dear child, I have known you a short time, and have not had any conversation with you till just now, but I can see that you are far too intelligent to say that we know only what we see. Go home and write out the list of things that you know to exist, or to be true, which you have not seen—but lay in an immense stock of blank books on your way home! My child, it is only what we do not see, I often think, that is powerless to deceive us, or to say it better, is safe to trust to enlighten our minds. Our eyes, like all our senses, are unreliable guides." Father Coigne smiled on Justine and she longed to trust him.

"But all that is faith, Father Coigne, and I have no faith!" she said instead. "It is exactly like 'Alice through the Looking Glass'—I don't mean this flippantly; it has often struck me as a ghastly joke! The Red Queen had to 'believe three impossible things before breakfast,' and that is like the requirements of Christianity."

"Well, my dear," said Father Coigne calmly, "I can only say that I have studied for a good many years, St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa of Theology, as well as lesser things, and I can truthfully affirm that I have never been required to believe one impossible thing. But we start out with the premise that God is Almighty, and almightiness and impossibility are not

words that can be used together. If I have been confronted with facts difficult to believe, it is science which offers them to me. Life, for instance, the life that lies in one seed, is lacking from another; heredity; the powers of my own mind, provided I eliminated a soul, and fell back on that convoluted coil that science tells me has understanding, memory, will! Has it occurred to you, my dear Miss Coburn, to think that St. Thomas Aquinas and all the long list of tremendous thinkers, accepted what you find too unsatisfactory to your intellect? Ah, there's a home run! Please cheer, Miss Coburn! My boys want me to yell over them!" Father Coigne accordingly shouted with all his might, and Justine joined in his cheers, discovering that his voice had a magnitude out of all proportion to his frame.

Father Coigne looked at Justine covertly. He had welcomed that home run as a cover to his hint that humility might be Justine's lack, rather than intellectual ability to believe. There are not many humble enough to welcome the accusation that they are lacking in humility.

Justine, however, showed no resentment. After she had ceased to shout, and she had cheered with an enthusiasm that warmed the priest's heart to her, she walked on again, silent. When she spoke she looked up at the priest with a sweet, wistful smile, and her eyes were sad.

"If you had time to spare me, Father Coigne, I should like to go to see you," she said. "There are so many things that I think of, difficulties that seem to be insurmountable. If I jotted them down and brought them to you, sometime when you had an hour to spare—"

"At any time, my child!" said Father Coigne. "I have no time for anything else when there is need such as yours to be met. But let me tell you what that saintly Curé d'Ars said to a man who came to him with doubts. 'Get on your knees,' said he over and over, till the intellectual person probably thought him a stupid old dear! Nevertheless, the prescription cured! There's only one way to study revelation, no other position, but on your knees! And every day say: 'Spirit of God, enlighten my darkness!'"

"There's something strange about the Catholic religion, something I can't analyze; it seems to me quite wonderful," said Justine hesitatingly, trying to express what she could not formulate.

"It's all of that!" cried Father Coigne gaily. "It's a great old Church! It may be old, but it has the vigor of its birthday, the first Pentecost. Which surely should show outsiders something, if they know how to think! Would you like to come over to meet our Sisters, the happiest women in the world, with their vows of chastity, obedience and poverty? One of them taught Peter, and she assures me he was a prime scalawag!"

"Not to-day, thank you," said Justine. "Isn't the game ending?"

"As sure as you live!" cried Father Coigne. "We'll have to go over there. I've some candy and other doctors' assistants over in the locker house. I thought I'd treat if the big boys won, and I knew I'd treat if the little ones won, so I prepared for either or both!"

Justine's laugh rang out girlishly. She was not a girlish girl, but the fine humanity of this man seized



her imagination and she responded to it, as she had, on the other hand, responded to his great spirituality which she had felt as he had spoken to her of his verities.

Peter was coming in from the diamond on his crutches, his face crimson, all the boys swarming around him, yet beautifully careful not to trip him.

"Hallo, Peter!" cried Justine, her eyes shining, her own cheeks red, a real girl for the moment, forgetting her problems, forgetting Peter's love for Isabelle, which was a hard thing to forget, glad to see Peter happy and adored.

"Hallo, Peter, did your side win?"

"You bet it did, Justine! Didn't you know it would?" Peter shouted back to her.

"He pitched for us both, so his side had to win," a solemn boy, one of the least of the little ones, carefully explained to her. "It was really and truly him what won on both sides."

"But I win now, little Linett minor!" cried Father Coigne, patting the small boy on his head. "Eats, boys! Who's ready?"

"What a question, Father!" the captain of the senior team shouted, and made for the locker house.

"If you don't mind, Justine, and Father will excuse us from the banquet, I'd rather like to get on home," said Peter. "Oh, I've had a great old time! I'm not too tired; just enough to make bed feel good."

On the way home Justine did not attempt to talk. Her mind was filled with new and wonderful impressions; she had set her foot on land which she had not known existed, a continent the discovery of which made Columbus' discovery pale.

She left Peter at his own door with a hand clasp

and a mere good night. Peter wondered slightly what made her so silent, but Justine's moods did not sharply penetrate Peter's consciousness.

He turned back, however, as he left her.

"I'm still in the ring," he said. "I'm still able to do some of the man's work in the world!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

*"Men at Some Time Are Masters of Their Fates."*

**T**HE time intervening before Peter's appointed date to essay his powers as a business man, was spent by him, in learning to use his crutches confidently.

With Dominico at hand to steady him when it was necessary, Peter walked alone up and down stairs in his own house, and then out in the street. He was in deadly fear at first of falling, and to be in any sort of physical fear was to him such an unknown sensation, that he felt that he was no longer himself, and, what was worse, that the new self was a humiliated, cowardly creature with whom he had scant patience and no sort of desire to abide.

But gradually, as it seemed to Peter, slowly, in reality with unusual quickness, Peter learned to use his crutches, and the nightmare of physical terror faded.

On the Sunday evening before he was to make his appearance in Coburn, Owen and Fitts' place of business, Giles came in to see him.

"Well, positively, Monk, one might think that you'd gone off to fulfill my name for you!" cried Peter. "It doesn't seem quite friendly to leave me in the lurch like this! Good thing we have a compact of mutual trust, no matter what happens! Better that I've an affection for you that won't distrust you. Why have you left me to my own devices?"

"I've been getting the new office started," said

Giles, avoiding Peter's eyes. "Say, Hermit, it's a James dandy! My family has been fixing it up; some fix! You should get there to see it, if you think you can."

"I do think that I can, and I think that I'm going to," said Peter. "Any more news of bright prospects, a new capitol at Washington, or a National Cathedral, or anything like that?"

"Well, I don't know," Giles pretended to consider. "My father's a regular promoter for a rising young architect! He's got some sort of pull with the fathers of the neighboring burg, the Borough Council of Midmaple. They're going to put up a new municipal building and I'm to submit a plan for it. There's a good chance of my getting the job, unless I make something pretty bad."

"Well, Giles, what do you know about that!" cried Peter slapping his friend on the back with a vehemence that proved to Giles that his arms were as good as ever. "A church, and a presbytery adjoining, and now a likely municipal building to start with, to cut your professional teeth on! Say, Giles, what a beginning! Hurray!"

"Yes, but that's influence," Giles reminded Peter. "The question is, whether I can make good. These things are due solely to influence."

"Oh, influence! Cut it out, Giles! That's what bothers me in you. Humility is all good and well, and conceit is not only disgusting, but impeding in many cases to getting far; a swelled head sticks in many a gate! But don't you say: *If* I make good! You say: I *will* make good! And get at it. If you make a hit with these two orders, you're launched at high tide! As to influence, it gives you a chance

to show what you amount to, but it can't put you over the top." Peter looked annoyed, yet he kept his hand lovingly on Giles' shoulder.

"Somehow, I'm never perfectly sure of myself," said Giles. "I get what I know are crackerjacks of ideas, but when I begin to soar, anticipating them on paper, something seems to say: You're a fool, Giles Guernsey!"

"That's me!" declared Peter. "You sure are a fool if you let 'I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat i' the adage.' Just you put all that's in you into those drawings, and the outcome will—it's sure to come out! Have you been staying away because you dreaded to tell me that you and Isabelle are engaged?"

"How did you hear that we were?" cried Giles.

Peter laughed and took his hand from Giles' shoulder to pat Canis Major's head, thrust close to his face, as the dog stood on his hind legs to reach him. Peter had difficulty in keeping his balance with one hand off a crutch, and Giles steadied him.

"Canis, how often have I explained to you that your Peter is now a shaky compound, instead of a solid man?" Peter reproached Canis Major.

"How did I hear that you were engaged?" Peter resumed. "Did I not dismiss you from here, hoping that you'd settle it on the way home? It really was settled already; it struck me as foolish to hedge behind the fact that you hadn't gone to draw up legal betrothal documents, French fashion, when everybody knew how it was to be. I'm glad for you, old Giles, and that's the truth."

"Well," began Giles, yielding himself up to Peter's cordial frankness, which he had been successfully

preparing for this interview, "you know, my father told me that it was only decent for a man to leave a girl free till he had made at least a start. But now I have started, and I think dad looked at it a great deal as you do, that it was practically settled, everybody understood about it, and it was hiding under a haystack with my feet out in sight, to postpone acknowledging it as an engagement. So—yes, we are engaged, Hermit! How did you hear of it?"

"I hadn't heard of it, but as I've reminded you before, they didn't amputate my head!" retorted Peter. "Do you suppose I don't know you well enough to know why you didn't come around? There's another thing for you to cut out, Giles Guernsey! We are friends. Neither of us would, or did harm the other. We agreed—we pledged ourselves—not to let Isabelle Chatillon come between us. We couldn't both marry her; you will. Lucky thing she liked you best in the first place, because I could not bring myself to let her marry a cripple. Yes, I could! That isn't true," honest Peter interrupted himself hastily. "But it's a good thing she liked you best, anyway, and don't imagine I'm sore at your luck, Giles; that would be a fine friendship!"

"Thanks, Peter, old Hermit!" said Giles affectionately. "I knew exactly what you'd say, of course; you're Peter the Great all right! If I were the only one to be considered, I don't believe I could take what you wanted, be happy at your cost. But there's Isabelle, you know; it's my business to think of her, not to let her be unhappy. Isabelle loves—" Giles pulled himself up short.

"Of course she does, Monk! I told you that long ago," said Peter turning away and twisting Canis

Major's plumed tail between his fingers. He wanted to elicit the rapture that Canis at once displayed over his slight attention; Canis' love seemed good just then. It was impossible to miss Giles' complacency, the self-centred complacency of a young and newly-betrothed lover. Giles was sorry for Peter; he loved him no less than ever, Peter knew well, but he was so submerged in bliss that for the moment he had lost his sensitiveness to Peter's unhappiness, and could ill disguise his intense satisfaction. Peter felt desperately alone, badly crippled and almost old.

"Well, I'm glad it's settled, and I'm glad it's settled in the way it is settled," said Peter. "I hope you'll marry soon. Anything doing in that line?"

"No; oh, my, no, indeed. We shan't be married for a long, long time!" exclaimed Giles.

"Now a long engagement is a thing I disapprove of and so does the Church," remonstrated Peter. "If you win out—as you will—with these two things this winter, I don't see why you couldn't chance it in the spring."

"Oh, yes; we probably shall," cried Giles, and Peter laughed.

"Seems near to you? Seems ages off to me!" Giles answered his laugh. "Dad says that as a part of what he has will be mine some day, he may as well settle it on me now, and let us begin to be happy some time after Easter, because then I'll have a decent little income independent of my profession. Dad is one fine father! He hasn't forgotten his youth. He says he doesn't like to see young people lose one single day of happiness that can be secured to 'em, and postponed happiness is a racking thing, Peter, really."

"Is it? So I've always heard," Peter said dryly. "It's easier not to expect anything. I'm going to begin my own business career to-morrow."

"I'll bet you make good, speaking of making good!" cried Giles with sincere enthusiasm. "And you're walking fine, Father Coigne told me. I can't wait to see you with your artificial legs. Then you won't need crutches."

"Maybe not, Giles, but I know I'll have to have two canes. There's considerable pain at times where they amputated. I doubt my giving up crutches, and I could see that the doctor doubted it the last time he looked me over. But if I go on crutches all my days I'm going to have a short pair made, give up trying to be a man's height. What difference do a few inches make when you've lost two feet? I beg your pardon, Monk, but I can't help it if you do loathe that brand of humor; I'm not so light-handed as I was in tossing witticisms! I don't mind telling you, Giles, that I'm an arrant coward these days! Up on these stilts of mine, likely to slip and plunge head foremost, and not having any feet to fall on, not even legs but a few inches below the knees—three, I think they say—I'm scared green! And I assure you, Monk, it's a rotten feeling! So if I'm going to lean on sticks, or crutches all my days, I'm going to have them cut down and go humbly looking up at my fellow men." Peter laughed a little, but Giles did not laugh. He forgot his happiness, forgot Isabelle, and looked silently at Peter with tears in his eyes.

"If I could trade, Hermit, dear old Peter, I'd do it," he said softly.

"Not much would I trade with you!" cried Peter jovially. "It's my job, and no other living being



would I give it to, not even to you, Monk, though it might merit for you true sanctity and a whole lot of good things, such as they tell me are coming my way, some day, because of this."

"What shall you do at Coburn's?" asked Giles, feeling that he must get away from the unbearable subject of Peter's misfortune.

"What I'm told, at first," said Peter. "Then the best I know with that information. I'm to inspect, not let stuff go out that might be below their standard. Wonder how I'll make out? Late in life to begin a career!"

"Get out! Twenty-four!" Giles scorned him. "Say, Hermit, know Luther Selden?"

"No. Who is he?" asked Peter.

"Some sort of confidential man at Coburn, Owen and Fitts'; I met him the other day," said Giles. "Look out for him. Purring, slick, meaching chap, too good to be true, regular Chadband type. Like Babcock, only more beautiful, as well as younger; wears clothes of preternatural excellence as to fit. And creaseless! Well, say! I'll bet you'll want to kick him."

"Hard for me to do under the circumstances," said Peter thoughtfully. "Still, a good trusty crutch could do a lot, if I sat down to it! You're sinning against charity, my son."

"Perception is not against charity, and instinct is given, even to the beasts. Just you wait!" Giles insisted. "I've got to go, Pete. I said I'd—" Again he checked himself.

"Tell Isabelle how truly glad and thankful I am. Good night, old chum," said Peter, putting his right hand on Giles' shoulder after his customary fashion,

and letting it slip down his arm till he found and grasped his hand. "I never would grudge you anything, Giles; the best—Isabelle—is good enough for you."

It was not a sleep-filled night for Peter. Giles' visit had not been conducive to sleep, expected though it was. Peter arose in the morning from troubled dreams toward its breaking, and made himself ready for his entrance into the world of affairs.

Dominico was to accompany Peter down to town and to call for him after hours at the imposing building in McKinley street which sheltered Mr. Coburn's firm. Peter did not yet dare risk boarding and quitting a trolley car alone.

"Now good-bye, and come down at five, unless I telephone you to come earlier," said Peter halting at the outer door of the building to take leave of his squire. "I neglected to inquire as to hours, but we'll be sure after this. And be a good boy, Dominico, and keep Canis Major reminded that I promised to be at home before supper."

Peter passed through the door which Dominico held open for him, and through the large entrance hall to the elevators at the rear.

"Jolly, you do mind it, you chump!" he addressed himself with fervent scorn, discovering his own embarrassment in passing small offices, screened, but with glass at a table height, behind which curious eyes of male and female clerks peered at him. "It might be less of an ordeal if I'd been to business when I had feet to carry me to it; the combination is tough!"

Peter entered one of the elevators and was shot up the one space which brought him to the second floor, upon which were the firm's offices. Mr. Co-

burn's private office was at the end, toward the street and the western light at the end of that floor; it ran across a large part of the front and side of the building, indicating the space which its occupant filled in the affairs of the firm.

"Ah, Peter Cassett!" said Mr. Coburn, after he had called: "Come in!" when Peter knocked. He retained his seat, then thought better of it, and, rising, came forward to welcome Peter with outstretched hand. Peter felt in him that unaccountable mingling of a liking that was almost affection, and a forbidding repulsion that had puzzled him in Mr. Coburn's manner to himself on previous meetings. There was no reason that he could conceive why Mr. Coburn should like or dislike him.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Cassett, and to receive you into our ranks," said Mr. Coburn. "I had not forgotten that you were to come to-day. Will you be seated? Annoying to use a trolley, I fancy. You must have your own roadster, if you decide to remain with us, avoid crowding. Miss Coburn tells me that she has driven you out in her little car, and that you have great aptitude for mechanical things. She tells me that you have given her some valuable hints as to her driving, in which she is a novice."

"Justine—Miss Coburn," Peter quickly corrected himself, seeing Mr. Coburn frown, "is not in need of many hints; she is wonderfully clever in handling the car, is not in the least timid, never fumbles. She has been as good as she could be, trying to make things pleasant."

"It is not a father's prejudice that makes me say that my daughter is a rare girl, a noble girl," said Mr. Coburn speaking with profound feeling, plainly

from an emotion that always lay near his surfaces. "She is clever, generous, devoted, true as the needle in the compass. There is no limit to the praise I would give my daughter, Mr. Cassett, nor any stint to what I would do for her happiness."

"Indeed, Mr. Coburn, I think everybody knows that," said Peter, touched, he could not have said why, by something nameless that he felt in this father of a solitary child.

"I hear that her former playmate and yours, Miss Chatillon, is to marry young Guernsey," said Mr. Coburn, looking sharply at Peter.

"This spring, I understand," Peter confirmed him. "She is beautiful in all ways, and I never could sing Giles Guernsey's praise to my satisfaction; we are close friends. That should be a marriage without a flaw. I hope and pray that it will be."

"Yes, yes. Justine, my daughter, was speaking of it to me last night. She also is enthusiastic over Miss Chatillon's loveliness of face and mind. Well, well! It's a singular thing, this choosing of one person out of the entire world and feeling that all life's happiness is bound up in obtaining him, or her, for a life-long companion! The tragedy lies not in losing the idol, but in winning it, and finding its feet clay and its miserable potter's stamp on those clay feet!" Mr. Coburn sighed, and Peter, recalling his wife, did not find the sigh inexplicable.

"Well, well! You did not come down here to discuss sentiment, and my mail is not read. You must meet my partners, and our confidential assistant, if I may so describe his undefined position with us, Mr. Luther Selden." Mr. Coburn rang an electric bell which was fastened underneath his table, and said to

the boy who answered his call: "Tell Mr. Fitts and Mr. Owen that Mr. Cassett has come, and ask Mr. Selden to come here."

In a few moments steps outside the office door preceded its opening. Peter placed his crutches and stood to receive the other two members of the firm, disregarding Mr. Coburn's permission to remain seated.

Mr. Fitts was extremely tall. His face was flushed with a chronic red caused by small veins just below his skin. He was almost lean; his face was smooth-shaven, his hair light with a greyish lustre over its surface, brushed abnormally smooth. His clothes were the last syllable of fashionable correctness as to cut, and they fitted him to a degree that would have suggested a paraphrase of the old problem of the precedence of the hen or the egg; one would wonder whether the man was made and the clothes put on him, or whether the clothes were made first and the man run into them.

Mr. Fitts bowed stiffly to Peter when Mr. Coburn presented him, but he followed the bow with a handshake. His light blue eyes were hard and keen; Peter instantly felt that behind them sat cruelty and selfishness. But Mr. Roscoe Fitts' reputation for severe propriety, and strictness of attitude toward church and social requirements might have helped Catholic Peter to that conclusion; Mr. Fitts, like Mr. Coburn, "attended" the Presbyterian church; whether that meant that they were Presbyterians it would have been rash to say.

Mr. J. Wesley Owen was not in the least like Mr. Fitts. He was short and stocky, his body as well as his face indicating his Welsh ancestry. His clothes

wrinkled as abnormally as Mr. Fitts' clothes sat smoothly. He looked capable of carrying away from the table spots from his cereal's cream, or his roast's gravy. His eyes were bluer than almost any eyes which Peter had ever seen; he wore a brown moustache and his hair was brown. His mouth slightly puckered, with an effect of suppressed whistling; his manner was bouncing, aggressive.

"How do you do, Peter Cassett; how do you do?" he said loudly, not offering his hand to the new arrival. It was not difficult to see that he harbored a conviction that Peter Cassett did not do well.

"This is our firm, Mr. Cassett," said Mr. Coburn needlessly, with a slight effect of uneasiness. "We hope that you will fall in with our ways; although, as you may perceive, we three partners personally are not much alike, still we are a united firm. Ah, here is Luther!"

Luther Selden entered the office, opening the door only enough to allow him to do so. Peter needed but a glance to show him why Giles had prophesied that he "would want to kick him." He did. A young man, not thirty, with a long, stooped-shouldered body, a long nose, thin lips, dark eyes which looked out from under his eyebrows obliquely and a manner that was insinuating and furtive. "Looks damp and subterranean!" Peter aptly characterized him in his thoughts.

"Mr. Luther Selden, Mr. Peter Cassett," said Mr. Coburn. "Mr. Selden will show you where you are to be employed, what are your duties. I will see you myself at eleven. I want you to lunch with me at noon sharp, if you please; we will discuss arrangements."

"This way, Mr. Cassett, please," said Luther Selden in a voice that "purred," as Giles had said.

Clicking after this pussy-footed young man on his crutches, Peter followed him to be initiated into the affairs of Coburn, Owen and Fitts.

## CHAPTER XIV

*"My Nature Is Subdued to What It Works In, Like the Dyer's Hand."*

THE winter that began for Peter upon crutches and his entrance into business, like its predecessors, ended in a spring, but resembled them in no other way. Peter would have been unable to describe its days in passing; each seemed brief enough, for they were all crowded with new experiences, yet the beginning of each month looked far withdrawn when Peter turned back to regard it from the last day of the month, and the sum total of the winter seemed like a twelvemonth.

Coburn, Owen and Fitts' affairs proved to be interesting; Peter soon decided that he liked business. Their output was exceedingly large, their product a fine piece of manufacturing, of the highest grade as to materials, executed in the perfection of accuracy and skill, finished so that a person ignorant of its value for its purpose, could not miss seeing that a thing so well-made must do what its producers claimed that it would do.

It was Peter's responsibility to see that each individual specimen of the delicate little instrument came up to its specifications. There was a factory inspector, but Peter received the shipments from the factory and inspected them in the wareroom, whence they went out upon their travels all over the United States. Thus, Mr. Coburn was assured there could be no falling-off in his goods. He took an unspeak-



able pride in the perfection of his commodity, and of course was also well aware that therein lay its security against competitors, its certainty of holding the market against all comers, with a steady increase of sales. If the factory inspector should ever prove corruptible, the wareroom inspector would stand as a dyke against the damage that he might do. Mr. Coburn had wanted Peter Cassett in this position before he was hurt, because he trusted Justine's opinion of the intrinsic honesty which he had shown in boyhood; Mr. Coburn did not believe that any subsequent training could make a man so absolutely reliable as that natural straightness in dealing and speaking which is some people's prenatal gift. And now in addition, he was sorry for Peter, really glad to link him up to life and its interests. He had not found it easy to bring his partners to his way of thinking, but he had at last succeeded.

Peter was making good from the start. He was keen, accurate, deft; he had that sort of mind which works with speed, but works correctly. Neither with his hands nor his brain did Peter fumble. His memory was remarkable; he had a wholesome regard for facts, and had the sense that correlates them, yet he was flexible-minded, so that the acquirement of one fact did not mean that he would close the doors behind it when it got into his brain, and refuse entrance to another fact which might dethrone the first one. Above all, he gave his time undividedly to his work and filled it with the best that was in him. Peter Cassett, in the employ of Coburn, Owen and Fitts, justified the senior partner in his selection of him. Luther Selden told his mother, to whom he talked of the firm's affairs rather freely, that "Peter Cassett

was a wizard. He simply leaped into understanding of what was shown him, and he was a corker at detecting a flaw." "I don't believe a thing wrong could get by him; material, finish, measurements, he's got 'em all right on tap, and what he doesn't see! I hate him like sin, but you've got to hand it to the old man for picking him out for that particular post. He's the man for the job, though I wish he was anywhere else, the cocksure beast! He's getting solid with the old man. It's easy seen that Coburn wants to put him ahead. I shouldn't wonder if he'd try giving him a junior partnership one of these days. That thin daughter of his is *so* kind to the poor cripple! Got a car when the unfortunate one began to get fit to go out. Funny thing, when you look at it close up! But when that firm's ready for a junior partner, I'm it, see!"

"Certainly, my darling! You ought to be in the firm, Lutie, such work as you do for it!" said Mrs. Selden, whose son was a masculine replica of herself.

A partnership was the farthest thing from Peter's thoughts, in fact in those thoughts there was no future plan. The day that was passing occupied him solely, unless it were that a large shipment was to go out two or three days later; then his mind anticipated it anxiously, lest he should not make his inspection in time. The present demanded of Peter all of his powers; what conscious place the future held in his thoughts was an exclusion of it. Peter tried to keep his mind closed to everything but the daily obligations of his employment. He went home at night physically weary, his mind as nearly a blank to all outside matters as he could hold it down to being. He took Canis Major for a walk every night on

which the weather allowed it. He kept his place among the men who practised the Perpetual Adoration, though Father Coigne saw to it that his successor came on at ten every Thursday, not letting Peter know that to do this he had himself taken the place of another man. But Giles, making the discovery, joined himself to the band of Perpetual Adoration, and every Thursday came to succeed Peter's two hours' guard in ample time to let Peter go to rest by ten.

Giles' house was going up in Woodcock Links. The suburban settlement across the river had a railway station by that name now; the golf links which had called it into being, standing its sponsor as to its name. Peter went out to see the new house several times on Sunday; he made some suggestions for Isabelle's convenience in her housekeeping, which Giles accepted with acclaim and which delighted Isabelle. It was to be an original house, but not eccentric.

"You know, I'm not going to distort the thing in order to have it unlike my neighbors' houses. If anyone ever calls it 'an artistic house'—well heaven help him! More likely to be her! I want it harmonious, simple. The queer things people build in order to be individual are quite awful," declared Giles with the autocracy of a firmly-established architect.

"Yes, they do inflict a sort of building eczema on the poor houses, don't they? But it's not as bad as it was," said Peter. "This won't be ready for you at Easter, Monk?"

"No," replied Giles. "Later on it will be held up more than you can now foresee. I've sent for tiles; they're made in England, and they won't get here for

quite a while. But just you wait till you see them, my Hermit! What would you say to my—to our—going across when we're married, for say, three months?"

"I'd say it was the idea of a mind entirely great," returned Peter promptly. "Could you do it? Leave your office so long? And trust the men to do the right thing by the house while you were away?"

"Mr. Chatillon would ask nothing better than to oversee the men, and by that time they'll be where they won't need me to hold them to the plan. As to the office, I'm a little dubious, but it has to be risked, because the trip is worth a lot to that office. I want to go over and study French cathedrals at first hand. I think I can adapt them to our climate and surroundings better than I can the English ones. Say, Peter, you wouldn't go over, either with us, or while we were there, just for a flyer? I'd give something to go about France with you, looking up the churches!" Giles was entirely in earnest, and Peter laughed.

"I've given in to being best man at your wedding—on crutches!—because you seem to think you can't get through it without me, but I'll be anything-ed-you-please if I join you on your honeymoon trip, like a *memento mori*!" he cried.

"*Memento* anything but *mori*, you'd be, old Hermit!" cried Giles with all his old-time affection.

It had seemed for a while that the new conditions might impair, not the love between these two, but the expression of it. Constraint, Peter's unescapable pain, Giles' consciousness of it, bade fair for a while to interfere with the close intimacy of these friends. But Peter had fought hard and won a great victory. He so far conquered his longing for Isabelle that it

lay down and dared not lift its head. He saw her at intervals, not as frequently as before, but often enough to remove constraint from her thoughts of him, her manner toward him. That miserable afternoon in Peter's living room, Isabelle managed to persuade herself, was not quite so bad as she had thought it at the time. She was so happy, so amazed at the width and depth of Giles' mind and soul, which she had imagined she knew, but which she found far beyond her imagination that she could only breathlessly marvel at him, and thank heaven which had made such a man as this love Isabelle Chatillon!

This sort of rapture of love and humility is most efficacious in banishing all previous interests. Isabelle sewed on her preparations for her marriage, dreaming of the life with Giles before her, dreams which bore slight likeness to the facts of life; anticipating France and her seeing it under the guidance of her gifted young architect who would teach her what to see, rightly to admire. When she arose from this preoccupation to greet Peter, her happiness overflowed upon him, making her pity him, but blotting out realization of actual sorrow. Isabelle was lovelier to look upon than she had ever been before; her face was all alight, her charm was irresistible, her sweetness denied to nothing which approached her. Peter found himself liking to go to see her and talk about Giles. He wondered, fantastically, whether the dead could get the fragrance of the flowers heaped around them, and be less cold for the warmth of the words spoken above them? It seemed to him that the way Isabelle now made him happy was not unlike this. But most of all was Peter thankful that

Giles and he were still one in love and trust, nor was Giles less appreciative than he of this great good.

By the first of February two important matters were settled for Peter. One was that the artificial legs which by that time he was trying to wear, were never going to be a success. He could wear them, and did wear them for a few hours at a time, but he could not long endure the nervous strain, partly pain, partly an irritating pressure which wore upon his nerves as the pain set them quivering. So Peter had to adjust his mind to the disappointment of a hope that had not been bright to him, but which everyone urged upon him, that he should some day be able to conceal his disfigurement, and walk without greater aid than a stick.

The second matter that was settled for Peter was that he was permanently established with the firm of Coburn, Owen and Fitts, if he cared to continue with it. Not only was Mr. Coburn making his acceptability felt, but Mr. Coburn's partners had discarded the reservation in liking for him which their manner toward Peter had made clear. J. Wesley Owen was most friendly to him, invited him to his home and suggested that his womenkind would be found ready to be good to a motherless youth.

"Mrs. J. Wesley Owen, Peter Cassett, is just about as good as they come, if I do say it," he declared. "What she can't do in the line of cake baking, preserve putting up, canning and the like, jellies and so on, ain't there to be done! You come around to my house some night and we'll trot out her stuff for you to sample with her cake, and I've got some hard cider that's—Well, say! I tell my wife that what's hard about that cider's to leave it in the cellar! Ha, ha,

ha! See? Don't you get it into your young head that we're so strict we don't allow any latitood for human cravings! Not a drop of whiskey in our house, no more than there is of those so-called mild wines that open the way for worse, but cider, made from honest farm-bred apples, that we keep in kegs! And, say, Peter Cassett, you'd better come sample it before it gets beyond cider, into vinegar. It's hard now, and lively! Our preacher was there the other night, and we pretty near killed ourselves laughing at him! Drank two glasses of our sparkling apple-sauce, and it sauced him all right! Couldn't walk straight for a while, honest truth! Nothing but cider, though; he's death on condemning table wines and all that. Fine man, he is; you'd have to like him."

"Thanks, Mr. Owen. I can't trust cider; I find it knocks me out quicker than lots of things. I can sympathize with your minister. But I'd like to come to see you at home. The truth is, I get pretty tired, and go to bed early nearly every night; I rarely go anywhere nowadays," said Peter.

"Bad for you, bad for you!" said Mr. Owen shaking his head. "Too young to let yourself go like that. But we appreciate your interest in our business, and I suppose you make long nights to get up refreshed for your work. I have young people in my home, my boy. Not a son. It's a sorrow to my wife and me, but we have to take what comes; no goods exchanged, hey? I've three daughters who are the best girls in Woodcock, come who will! Hildegarde, she's twenty years old, and the best looking of them. But I'll give you a friendly hint to regard her loveliness indifferently; I guess our young friend, Luther

Selden, is on the inside track there. But Leona, and even young Gladys, though she's not quite sixteen, and they're not so pretty as the eldest, are fine girls, and plenty good looking enough, plenty! They're lively ones, too! They dance everything; the latest. I'm a strict Methodist, you know, but I don't feel I can compel my girls to see with my eyes. They are sort of gay, harmless, but gay! Boys have a good time at our house, and the Missus and I keep out of the way; we know our day is past! You come around, Peter—I'm going to call you Peter!—and you'll be just as welcome as if—as any boy in Woodcock."

Two days later Mr. Roscoe Fitts met Peter in the elevator, and held him in the hall for a few words.

"How goes it, Peter?" he asked, regarding Peter sharply with his unsmiling eyes, while he smiled at him with his muscles.

"You'd have to tell me that, Mr. Fitts, if you mean how goes my work," Peter answered. "I hope well?"

"I'm not asking about that; I know, we all three know, that it goes well," said Mr. Fitts. "You're a great boy, Peter Cassett, and you're no end valuable to us. I may as well own up that Owen and I didn't care a whole lot about your coming here when Justin Coburn urged you on us. He thought you would be all right, but we weren't keen about having a Roman Catholic in a position of trust. Then I do think that one should maintain his principles. I'm opposed to Romanists, and I don't believe in putting things in their way; I belong to the—well, as to that, I'm not talking. But I do believe in America for Americans."

"Right you are, Mr. Fitts! My ancestors came



over here in 1698, on one side, and on the other they followed after in about 1749. So I've a right to go along with you in excluding all the poor devils that land on Ellis Island," said Peter, with a gleam in his eye which Roscoe Fitts was too sharp-sighted to miss. "I had grandfathers and odds and ends of progenitors in the Revolution, and in the Civil War, and I believe the story my mother used to tell me of my own patriotism in the Spanish War, when I was a year old, and had a small flag which I waved when my nurse sang 'There's a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night.'"

It violently disagreed with Roscoe Fitts to be ridiculed, and he could hardly help knowing that his inspector was making fun of him, with that entire recklessness as to consequences which would always be one of Peter's most salient characteristics. It suited Mr. Fitts now, however, to take what he privately dubbed "his impertinence" in good part, though he filed it away in his memory for future reference. He laughed with a great effect of enjoyment and clapped Peter on the back.

"You wag!" he cried. "You got me that time! Or don't you know that we Fittses came into the country in the person of my grandfather, which means in about 1867?"

"No, Mr. Fitts, I really didn't know a thing about your family," said Peter. "But it ought not to make a great deal of difference; if a man chooses his country, and intends to stand by its best interests, it seems rather picayune to demand his family register, doesn't it? We've had such splendid citizens among those we had to naturalize, and such quitters among the old stock."

Mr. Fitts shook his head dubiously. "Well, Peter, there are exceptions to all rules, and no intelligent person ought to refuse to accept evidence that a man is what he is, but there's a strong presumption that long assimilation of American ideals has got to have its effect. We are our ancestors; science teaches us that, and common experience illustrates the consequence of heredity," he said solemnly.

"Well," said Peter the incorrigible, with a laugh, "I believe in original sin! That is an old inheritance, yet as definitely marked as you could ask."

Again Mr. Fitts shook his head, this time much more dubiously.

"Oh, as to that," he said, "that is a crude way to try to account for the existence of evil. I don't think it can be explained. All the races have had some story like that of Adam and Eve; I mean a mythological tale to explain how evil got into the world."

"I thought Presbyterians' long suit was original sin, and that they didn't hold out much chance of a man's getting rid of it, however he'd like to," cried Peter.

"Old-fashioned Presbyterianism, maybe," said Mr. Fitts with a shrug. "I assure you I never hear anything of that sort discussed from our pulpit. We hear able discussion of public events and their bearing on ourselves as a nation, as business men, or else what I might term an essay, delivered, not read. You would enjoy Mr. Whittier, Peter; I'll take you to hear him some Sunday. He is still what I should call young, nearing forty, and decidedly bright, has wit and a delightfully epigrammatic way of putting things."

"That's good of you, Mr. Fitts," said Peter, wondering why this cordiality to him.

"Not at all; I'd be glad of your company. I go pretty regularly when the links are snowy, as now. I'd like you to come around to my club with me to lunch, Peter. Mr. Coburn has captured you once or twice, I believe, but I'd like to show you where I eat. It's a small club, exclusive, quiet, extremely well done, I think. You'd meet pleasant men there, and I fancy you need to get about more. Pleasure is not denied you because you've met with misfortune. I rather like to feel that a young fellow is not living like his own maiden aunt." Mr. Fitts laughed and looked at Peter knowingly.

"That dear lady is not living in any wise, if I ever had one, Mr. Fitts. I'm guiltless of a maiden aunt!" said Peter. "Why do you all suddenly conclude that I need to have a good time administered to me, Mr. Fitts?" blunt Peter went on. "Mr. Owen asked me around to his house to see his girls dance—I don't think he meant me to dance!—and to try his cider-with-a-kick. Now you want to introduce me to men who would liven me up. What do you all see in me that makes you suddenly fall to trying to cheer me?"

"My dear boy, I didn't know J. Wesley had asked you to his house, but why not go?" Mr. Fitts answered patiently. "What we see is a young fellow who has had hard luck, and doesn't deserve it. We see that young fellow faithfully serving our interests. Is it strange that we would like to see him enjoying himself, as a young fellow should? Personally, I'd like to start you on the road to enjoying life to the top of your bent. The Owen girls are

called extremely lively; I don't know them myself. And I'll take you to my club and launch you; the rest is up to you. It isn't strange that we value you, Peter, and want to see you in the swim."

It was a friendly answer, though Peter suspected that it might not be what Father Coigne would call a kind one; it hinted of gaiety which Father Coigne would not welcome for his Peter the Great. But his employers were anxious to do their best for unfortunate Peter, as they saw that best. Peter's heart went out to the kindness, the more that he had begun by doubting it.

"Thanks, Mr. Fitts. That was a nice thing to say, and I do appreciate it," said Peter. "I'd like to see your club, thanks. Now I'd better see the wareroom! Will you dock me when I'm late through talking with one of the Heads? Much obliged, Mr. Fitts. So long."

## CHAPTER XV.

*"'Tis Not for Gravity to Play at Cherry Pit with Satan."*

**I**N THE employ of Coburn, Owen and Fitts, but considerably below the level of the firm's offices, Peter had discovered a boy of about fifteen to whom his heart had gone out before he learned his identity.

He was to be called sandy-haired, if one were considerate, carrotty-haired if one were not, and he had a face that danced with the joy of life; humor covered it over and above its abundant freckles. He was Michael Roache by name, and Peter, after his attraction to him had led him to cultivate his acquaintance, in spite of the distance intervening between their natural contact, discovered that he was the lad whom Giles and he had heard acclaiming Peter as having "run fer de priest," on that walk to the station, after the games, which had proved to be Peter's last untrammelled walk. "Mickey the roach" the other boys employed by the firm called him, and Micky did not mind after he had once established beyond question, by the use of his fists, the fact that he was not obliged "to take nothin' off'n 'em."

Mickey adored Peter from four distinct and separate points of view: first, that he had been the champion that won the Woodcock Marathon races; second, that he was at once "a good sport" and not unlike the saints in the way he bore his misfortune; third, that he was a "hustler" at business, and fourth,

and almost most, that he came down from his pinnacle, with no effect of descent, to make friends with Micky.

But Micky distinctly did not adore Luther Selden. He came in contact with him in his work, whereas he had nothing to do for Peter, and Mickey loathed the young man's smoothness, which often was combined with nasty thrusts at the boy and unreasonable demands upon him.

"Dam—age him!" Micky burst out one day to Peter, who was chatting with Micky in the final fifteen minutes of the boy's lunch hour, during which Micky elegantly supplemented a scanty provision from home with two cheap, but adult-looking cigarettes. He had modified his expletive as he caught Peter's eye. Peter was trying to qualify Micky for the Holy Name Society, which he badly needed.

"Say, he's a lulu, Mr. Cassett! I'd like to take a trainin' an' stand up to 'um. I bet I'd put another smile on 'um, a crooked one that wouldn't come off for a few minyutes! I hate dat tuber rose, you bet! What d'je s'pose he done to-day?"

"I don't know, Micky. I'd rather not be able to guess what Mr. Selden might do! But you mustn't hate him, Micky; it's bad for your liver and digestion, as well as mighty bad for your soul. Try to soar above him, Mick!" advised Peter with a grin. "Micky, did you ever hear him talk about his dog?"

"Did I ever! Did I—well, come now! Don't he blow about dat dog the whole time? You might think there never'd been a dog wid four legs on 'um before! If he was so fond of 'um he was silly—like a girl, see?—I wouldn't mind so bad, though

it would make you sick, but it's just blowin' he do be, like there never was nothin' up to what Luther Selden's got; like he'd slopped over on his dog, an' made him a soup of dog, do you call it?" said Micky furiously.

"I think you mean super-dog, Mick, but you've got the idea," Peter replied, keeping his smile within bounds, for Micky was suspicious of ridicule. "It would be a pity if he lost that dog, say for about a week, wouldn't it, Mick? If someone stole him, for instance, and kept him tied up in a safe place, where no one would think of looking for him, till his master had got going well? Then, of course, he'd have to be restored to him. Wouldn't that be a pity—sort of to disturb Luther Selden's peace like that?"

Peter looked with extreme gentleness of expression at Micky, and Micky stared at Peter blankly; then a smile that made it look pale radiated to his hair.

"Oh, gee! I get je!" Micky cried blissfully. "Oh, gee! An' I know the feller dat'll put it through; he's a friend o' mine."

"Couldn't have a better recommendation, Mick!" interpolated Peter.

"Him an' me'll swipe de mutt, an' he'll take 'um off to his house. He'll treat 'um right; he ain't never mean to anyemuls. We'll put dat t'rough, Mr. Cassett, an' dat gravy boat'll never get wise to us!" cried Micky, his joy mounting.

"I'm not perfectly sure that he might not suspect you, Mick; he's proficient at suspecting and I believe he's a long head at ferreting out secrets. We'll arrange a code. If I discover that Selden is

getting warm in his search for his dog, and I can't get at you to tell you privately, I'll call you on the office telephone, or I'll say in passing—let's see! What could I say? Cool na footh! Backtha omadhaun! Say, that's a peach, Micky!" cried Peter, with as much boyish delight as Micky could feel.

"Sounds enough like Irish to pass with a gentleman who doesn't know any—neither do I, so I can judge it!—But it means: 'Cold feet! Back with the omadhaun'—that 'na' is just stuck in for verisimilitude, Mick, and you'll have to pardon 'foot,' and 'cool,' for feet and cold; it runs better! That 'th' on the end is also a trimming!"

Micky stood on his head to express his appreciation of this near Gaelic, and said: "I get je, Steve! It's me grandmother come back by de sound of it! I'll get——"

Peter made a slight gesture with one hand, and Micky pulled himself up short.

Luther Selden came quietly past the door, but stopped as he saw Peter.

"Down here, Mr. Cassett?" he asked blandly.

"Down here, Mr. Selden," Peter corroborated him, turning to go with Selden to the elevator. "So long, Micky! That's right; you learn the old Irish when the chance comes your way. It's a rich tongue, difficult to pronounce, but rich, and I'd like to read the ancient legends in it myself. You're more of a boy than I gave you credit for being, Michael Roache."

It was hard on Micky, but he played up, gave Peter a respectful bow of farewell, and murmured: "Thank you, sir," with a deference he would have paid Mr. Coburn.



"Interesting boy, that Micky," said Peter to Luther Selden in the elevator. "Bright! I enjoy drawing him out considerably."

"Curious. I dislike that boy most of any of our small fry. He's impudent, and I'm inclined to doubt his honesty," said Luther Selden.

"I think his impertinence is only on the surface. Micky has not sacrificed to the graces; I fancy the graces have no altar in his immediate neighborhood. I've no sort of suspicion of his honesty, Mr. Selden," returned Peter indifferently.

"You probably understand him better than I do," suggested Luther Selden, with one of his smiles from beneath his face, thrust forward, and bent down. "The Irish are tricky."

"That remark might require explanation, made in that particular context, Mr. Selden, but I think I understand you, if not Micky," said Peter, with a frank look.

"Little to understand in me; I am exactly what you see, serving my employers, and living only for my dear mother, who is dependent upon me and adores me. Why 'Mr. Selden'? Why should we not be Peter and Luther? Two young fellows of the same age?" replied Luther Selden.

"Maybe because Peter and Luther don't run well together!" Peter laughed with an air that disarmed offence, yet Luther Selden did not miss his point.

"Oh, come now, Cassett, why shouldn't they? Trains for Rome and Wittenberg come in together at the terminal," cried Selden, pleased with himself for the literary effect that he had given his retort.

The next day, and for many days, Luther Selden was bewailing the loss of his vaunted dog, the dog

whose master's praises of him for his virtues in field, home, roadside, and duty to his master, had somewhat wearied Luther Selden's younger associates.

He advertised the dog in all the papers, stating that he "answered to the name of 'Fluffy.'"

"Wouldn't you know it?" Mickey had groaned when he read this.

Micky interviewed Peter on the propriety of claiming the reward, but Peter had sternly made clear to him that a trick was all right, but profit from it was all wrong. Micky's ideas were confused, but he was ready to learn from Peter.

On the sixth day after the dog's disappearance, Luther Selden came to Peter with wrath in his eyes, his customary smile vanished, his face pale.

"I think I've found out about my dog," he began without preliminaries.

"Good enough!" cried Peter, closely examining a tiny spring, testing it with his finger tip. "Someone take him in where he strayed? Or was he stolen?"

"He is stolen; tied up," said Selden savagely. "It confirms my opinion of your friend down below, Mick."

"Now don't tell me that Micky steals! I can't believe it. And he has no home to take the dog to; he lives with a woman who is no kin to him," cried Peter.

"The dog is not directly in that boy's hands, but he is at the bottom of the theft. I shall have him back this afternoon, and the thief—the thieves—arrested. I've sent the officer after 'Fluffy.' I'm afraid you'll have to transfer your interest to one

of the other boys in our employ, if you enjoy youthful society, Mr. Cassett." Luther Selden spoke savagely.

"Well, well, I'm sorry to be disappointed in Micky, but I suppose he hasn't had much upbringing. Just a moment, please." Peter stepped to the telephone.

"That you, Ben?" he asked, recognizing Micky in the response, but pretending to think it was Luther's own favorite. "Oh, all right! I'll want to send you on an errand, in a short time. We need some invoice blanks from the printer. Yes, Mick could go, if you can't. By the way, tell Mick that phrase is: 'Cool na footh. Backtha omadhaun.' Get that? Yes, it's hard, but you caught it fine."

Peter replaced the desk instrument and turned to Luther Selden pleasantly, having heard Mick's excited: "Glory be! I'll hustle!" as he hung up.

"Do you speak Irish? I thought you weren't Irish," said Selden.

"Neither am I, but I'd like to understand all tongues; no language comes amiss," Peter responded.

"You don't use English in church. I suppose that, and your Roman allegiance is what keeps Roman Catholics from being true Americans," said Selden, and Peter saw that he was in such a fury about his dog that he was spoiling to be disagreeable.

"I must remember to call Ben and say to him exactly what I said to Mick; Selden'll be sure to ask him if I had him on the 'phone," thought Peter.

"Maybe it is," Peter then blandly agreed with Selden. "To be sure, it didn't strike deep into the 165th and Father Duffy, in the big war, but it probably affects us subtly, you can't discover how."

Then the reckless imp that was in Peter, always ready to waken and get him into scrapes, aroused and led him to "give Selden a song and dance," as he said to himself.

"You see, Selden, it's like this," Peter said, laying his crutches across the table and leaning over confidentially. "The priests are liable to come from almost any race; it's not like Protestantism; that's limited to certain superior races. And we have to keep the priests informed of all the doings of our neighbors, you see. In that way they get thorough reports of inside value, to send to the Pope, and, to be certain that there's no mistake in our reports, it's well for us to get up as many languages as we can. It's a great system; you can easily see how it would work."

Luther Selden listened with his dark eyes for once wide-open, his face expressive of the most rapt, but also horror-stricken attention.

"For heaven's sake, Cassett!" he gasped.

"Surely; just that. We earn heaven that way. You've grasped the whole thing, I see," cried wicked Peter.

"And you don't have Commandments, the same Ten we do, I'm told!" said Selden.

"Yes, and no," said Peter, not willing to go too far in this direction. "We divide them up differently; I wouldn't say they were different, less, you know. We make the first and second of the King James version into one, but we emphasize your single tenth by dividing it, and counting the prohibition to covet our neighbor's wife the ninth; coveting his goods the tenth. After all, it is another sort of sin to covet one's neighbor's wife than to covet

his auto, for instance."

"Well, you see, we consider it a sin to worship images—as of course anyone must admit it is, if he believes in the Bible at all! Don't you think that is why you lump our second commandment, which relates to making images, with the first one? It is not emphatic that way?" Selden said.

"Never once thought of that, Selden!" cried Peter. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian! Do you suppose that is why we people have images in our churches? But yet you often have in your homes enlarged, and rather fearful crayon portraits of your dead relatives! I don't know, I don't know, Selden," Peter shook his head discouragedly. "It is the perversity of human nature, I fear. Protestants have the images of those they love, too; the only thing is that they don't love the saints. But you've given me a valuable suggestion."

Luther Selden turned away. "You've given me far more than a suggestion, Cassett," he said, and departed.

"Hope you'll find your 'Fluffy,' Selden; perhaps he will come home. Dogs often turn up when the home they've made desolate has given up hope," Peter called after him.

On his return home that night Luther Selden found his "Fluffy" ensconced on his forsaken cushion, and Mrs. Selden coaxing him to eat more after he had passed his capacity by considerable.

"The officer came here, Lutie, and reported that there wasn't any dog at the house where you sent him; no sign that there ever had been one, and the woman—an Irish woman, declared they never had owned a dog; said she couldn't abide them. Then,

some time after the officer had gone, I found 'Fluffy' on the doorsteps; indeed I heard him whine, so I went to look. He isn't in the least hungry, and he shows no sign of abuse." Luther's mother fondled "Fluffy," asking him if he'd missed her.

"It's that confounded Mick Roache at the bottom of it, and I wouldn't put it past Peter Cassett to lend a hand. I wonder what that Irish sentence means? I forgot to ask Bennie Levy if Cassett had talked to him on the 'phone or whether it was Mick all the time!"

Luther Selden went early to business the next morning. He got hold of Mr. Owen and was closeted with him some time. Then, later, Mr. Owen sought the senior partner, carefully closing behind him the door of his private office.

"Mr. Coburn, I feel that I must report to you a conversation which our Luther had with Peter Cassett," he began. "I have always known that Roman Catholics were not to be encouraged, but now we are told on the authority of this young man, who is better informed than many of them, that there is a regular system of espionage among them, tabulating every American citizen and his affairs, for the benefit of Rome! This being the case, I know that you must feel with me that Roscoe and I were right to oppose taking this fellow into our employ, but how right we were, we had no idea, no sort of idea."

"Bad as that!" exclaimed Mr. Coburn, reversing the crossing of his legs, and settling back in his chair. "Go on, Mr. Owen; I am lending you my ears."

Mr. Owen plunged at once into the black tale of the Roman system of a universal detective agency, maintained to an end not clearly visible. It was

creditable to Luther Selden's accuracy of hearing and repetition, as it was to Mr. Owen's, that Peter's shameless acknowledgment was retailed to Mr. Coburn with only minor variations in the text.

To Mr. Owen's amazement, and no slight disgust, Justin Coburn laughed aloud when he had finished.

"Do you want our business described in detail, our methods, above all the material and making of our valuable monopoly told to this Gregory Coigne here, and through him to the people higher up? If you do, I do not! I am not the head of the firm, but as a member of it I protest against the employment of a young man so inimical to us!" J. Wesley Owen said hotly.

"Just what do you suppose the Pope would do with our monopoly, Mr. Owen?" asked Mr. Coburn.

"Who can say? Hand it on to men who would manufacture and give a share of their profits to Peter's Pence, perhaps. No one can foretell the workings of these people's minds. I am sure Roscoe will feel as I do," insisted Mr. Owen.

"My dear Owen, cultivate a sense of humor!" advised Mr. Coburn, lifting the edges of a pile of envelopes on a paper knife and nicely balancing the pile. "Such an absurd story is not to be taken seriously."

"Why would Peter Cassett have told it?" demanded J. Wesley Owen. "You find it funny; I do *not*! Luther said that Cassett was in dead earnest. Why would he have told it?"

"Peter has an incorrigible love of mischief," said Mr. Coburn easily. "He saw that Luther was ready to swallow anything, provided it had a sufficiently

unpleasant flavor, and he cooked that nonsensical yarn for him! Have you never heard of answering a fool according to his folly? That principle is why Peter told that story. Our Luther is a good clerk, but he has not a sense of humor, which I'm afraid is also lacking in you, Owen! Can't you see that if it were true Peter never would have told it? The scamp! But I'm glad he feels up to tricks."

"Mr. Coburn, Justin Coburn," said J. Wesley Owen solemnly. "I repeat that I believe the story. Later I want you to remember that I believed that story, and warned you with all the earnestness at my command. Whether our monopoly is infringed upon through this fellow's betrayal of us, or not, he is not to be trusted, that's clear. And I warn you that you are doing wrong to play with such matters. They are getting a vote in this country that is a menace. I hope that you are not tolerating Romanism? It is corrupting many who were born of godly stock, in this country and in England."

"Do you mean that I may go over to it? Now liking and trusting Peter Cassett is by no means one with going over to Peter's authority, my friend," said Mr. Coburn.

"It is insidjuous," remarked Mr. Owen, whose misapprehension of the word was ineradicable.

"Possibly, but I am invulnerable," Mr. Coburn said, not wholly as if he liked himself better for it. "See here, Owen, I may as well make myself understood on this point; I foresee the likelihood of misapprehension arising in this connection. There is no reason why I should explain myself to you; business partnership does not involve the slightest claim of either of us three upon one of the other's private



affairs. I would consider my attitude toward any religion decidedly my private affair. Yet I would prefer that you should know my position. I shall never—perhaps I mean I *will* never become a Roman Catholic. I do not share your prejudice against that oldest and only actually surviving Christian Church. No; I beg the Eastern Catholics' pardon; they do survive, but I think that they also prove that vitality is feeble when branches are cut off from the main vine. However, the Roman Church of all which we personally know alone is living. She is a tremendous power. The mistake you people are making is not to see that she does not get her power from the ballot. Political power is not spiritual power; it is not that which crowds the churches in the cities out to their steps every half hour, every Sunday of the year, and gives Father Coigne the one packed church in Woodcock. I see her as she is, and I admire her. But never while I live will I go into her ranks. That is enough to say; my reasons are my own. So far from fearing her, I recognize her as the bulwark of the republic. She stands against divorce; she fights for the indissolubility of marriage, as she fights for the legitimate end of marriage—children. She alone has power over women's consciences sufficient to make them rather die, or live, worn and faded and tied down, the mother of children, than to be free to enjoy life at the price of crime. She sustains people in a daily martyrdom, which is harder to do than to inspire them to face torture and the stake at high, enthusiastic pressure—witness Peter Cassett, whom you are trying to make me distrust! There is something in all this that is not to be disregarded, nor explained

away. But I shall never enter the Old Church, and that is as final, as sure, as if I were already dead. I know my own mind, so don't worry over me, J. Wesley Owen."

"Well, I appreciate your confidence, Mr. Coburn, though I deplore your judgment," said Mr. Owen, considerably at loss how to respond to this exposition, to reasoning which he was unable to follow. He fell back on the personal note, which is the one which his sort of mind best utters.

"Your daughter, Justine, was seen coming out from the priest's house the other day," he said. "I suppose you knew she went there?"

Mr. Coburn's pile of envelopes fell off his paper cutter, he leaned forward slightly. "No, I didn't know," he said.

"My second girl, Leona, was coming along when Justine came out. It isn't hearsay," Mr. Owen said with subdued triumph. "She spoke to her."

"Justine didn't mention having seen Father Coigne, but there's no reason why she should. She is free to go where she will, to do what she sees fit. I can imagine her finding a great deal to enjoy, to inspire her in that remarkable man. She is a girl not easily satisfied; her mind is reasonable to the last degree." Justine's father spoke thoughtfully, somewhat wistfully. Then he looked up and smiled.

"I can answer for myself, not for Justine," he said. "She is capable of great deeds. I would never dream of attempting to trammel such as she."

## CHAPTER XVI.

*"Mend Your Speech a Little Lest It May Mar Your Fortunes."*

PETER went on his way throughout that winter without a thought of the information which he had given Luther Selden of the system of espionage established by his Church in the United States. Nor did he remember the trick which he had suggested to Micky of the theft of Selden's dog, unless Micky himself recalled it, with the delight which bubbled up in him anew when he saw Peter. Both these absurdities had been a passing pleasure to Peter, without plan or malice, but they had served to make Luther Selden who, negatively, had never liked Peter, into a positive enemy. If Peter had been telling him the truth of the Roman Catholic Church then Peter, as one of its most loyal adherents, was not fit to have about. If he had been, as Luther said to himself, "putting one over on him," then it was still worse, quite unpardonable. Luther Selden would not tolerate anyone who made fun of him.

Luther had a strong suspicion that his dog's disappearance was indirectly due to Peter. He could not conceive of anyone doing a thing of that sort merely for the joy of it; he was sure that his "Fluffy" was to have been kept, but that the thieves had been frightened into returning him by Luther's resolute action for his recovery.

"A dog thief is about as low as you get," said

Luther to his mother, "and you'll see what will come of having that Peter Cassett about."

In the meantime Peter Cassett continued to be about the offices and wareroom of Coburn, Owen and Fitts, cultivating oblivion to Selden, who was obnoxious to him. Spring began to reveal its approach, the warm days of March bringing arbutus in the out-lying woods and small flies on piazza posts, especially where they were newly painted; then the sudden cold days of March, with rain and wind, which turned ill-regulated thoughts from thinner clothing back to the thicker kind of winter wear with gratitude that it had not been discarded. Yet these variations, each in its way, advanced the spring, the spring which meant to Peter but one thing—Isabelle and Giles' marriage.

There came a night in late April, the finish of a beautiful, soft-aired, sunny day, when Peter sat almost the entire night long looking out of his window, through the moon-rising, through its passing overhead westward, and till it sank, leaving the stars undimmed. The day had been like a dream to him; it was only now, in the time for dreaming, that he was wide awake and reviewed the day's events, for the first time actual to him. He saw the quiet wedding in the church, the Nuptial Mass, himself standing beside Giles, while he and Isabelle promised to be as one person for the rest of their lives. He heard what Father Coigne said to them, simply, briefly, out of the depth of a strong affection for them both. He saw the wedding breakfast, with only the nearest of kin and friendship present; a pretty breakfast, given by Mr. Chatillon in his beautiful house, set in the midst of flowers, but not elabo-

rate, with toasts and speeches, and formality omitted. He did not guess that Isabelle and Giles had made their wedding as simple as possible, as private and brief, and had deferred a reception until their return into their own house, out of consideration for Peter.

"He is lame, and he is lonely," said sweet Isabelle, not adding that he loved her. "Let us try to make it as easy for him as we can; it seems wicked to ask him to stand up with you, Giles, yet he would feel, as we do, that it was his right. We'll try to make it as easy as we can."

Peter saw himself in his new, fine morning coat, with the wedding blossom in its lapel, walking down the station platform with two canes, no crutches, on the artificial legs which hurt him, because he would not let an out-and-out cripple be groomsman to Giles, marrying Isabelle. Peter had never been to the station since the day of the accident, and now he was there to bid his beloved Giles good-bye, to set the seal upon his complete renunciation of Isabelle. It seemed to Peter, vaguely, because everything that was happening that morning was shrouded in a merciful mist which shut out all clear realization, that the place was filled with the menace of maiming; once more he was there to suffer loss.

He remembered that Giles had held him by both hands, clutching Peter's shoulders, hardly able to speak. Tears were in good old Monk's eyes, and the clutching hands shook. He said good-bye to Peter last of all, as the train was slowing up to stop. He had tried to say something about his return, and "Peter's room in the new house," but it had not been a success. With a sob in his throat,

Peter now recalled, Giles had turned from him to board the train and go away with Isabelle, with his wife. Giles and Isabelle were on the ship that was carrying them to France to look at cathedrals and to take their first lessons in learning to see each other as they actually were. Peter wondered how late they had lingered on the deck, watching the moon, as he was doing.

Canis Major sat with his head upheld by Peter's hands, between Peter's knees. At intervals he made another attempt to hitch his body up a little closer to Peter; it was already heavily leaning against him, and his eyes were more than usually adoring because he sensed Peter's mood. Nevertheless, it was lonely sitting there, with no one in the house but Mrs. Rior-dan, asleep upstairs, and Giles, his life-long chum, sailing hourly farther from him. Peter arose at nearly four with a heavy sigh, and pulled down the shade.

"To-morrow is Sunday," he thought, winding his watch. "I believe I'll try to get hold of Justine Coburn after Mass. She's the best friend I have left, and as good as they come, whoever else is at hand for comparison."

Peter and Dominiço came back from St. John's church at a few minutes after eight. Peter was on his crutches again, "his improvements," as he delicately styled them, discarded.

"What's the use of living in your native city if you mayn't go about honestly, and as comfortably as may be, in the rôle of the cripple, which everyone knows that you are?" he asked Dominico, and Dominico sorrowfully admitted that one might thus go about. Peter called up Justine before he sat down

to breakfast.

"Anything on for the morning, Justine?" he asked, over the wire. "You told me once to summon you when I needed your car to be driven somewhere. I don't want the car; I want you. And I don't want to be driven somewhere, but to have you drive something other than the car, drive things out of me. Do you mind? And are you free?"

Justine's voice, her beautiful voice, which, with her eyes, was Justine's best physical gift, thrilled with pleasure, clearly distinguishable over the wire, as she cried eagerly:

"Indeed I'll come, Peter! And bless you for turning to me this way! I was wondering if I might get you out for a drive later in the day. How soon shall I go to get you?"

"Anytime after a half an hour; I've not had my breakfast, but I've been to Mass. Sure you had nothing else on?" said Peter.

"Thomas doubted; you're Peter!" Justine called back with a happy laugh. She did not say that she had promised her father to go with him for a long walk.

"Father won't mind; he understands," thought Justine, rightly counting on her father's readiness to go, or forego, as best suited her.

Justine's shining roadster stopped at Peter's door exactly three-quarters of an hour later. Justine did not want to curtail her morning unnecessarily.

Dominico handed Peter in; he had followed Peter with his crutches.

"I'm not trying to be ornamental, Justine," said Peter, seeing that Justine glanced at them. "Only trying to be comfortable."

"Do the—the other things hurt?" asked Justine as she started the car.

"Like everything," said Peter. "What's the difference? When one has friends with a car and kindness combined?"

Justine glanced at him covertly. She thought that he looked worn and pale; she shrewdly guessed his vigil. "Better keep off the subject," she told herself, and said:

"Peter, I want to scold you, please."

"Certainly. I often share that desire; I need it more than you can possibly know. Fire away, Dusting!" laughed Peter.

"Well, then, it's on account of your imprudence," began Justine. "Why did you tell Luther Selden all that nonsense about the Catholic system of espionage, pray?"

"System of espionage? *Catholic* system of espionage? What are you talking about, Justine? I never told anyone anything of that sort! How could I when there isn't any?" cried Peter.

"Precisely!" Justine retorted. "That's why you'd no business to do it, you foolish Peter! Of course you did tell him! Don't you know there's no limit to what a person like Luther Selden will believe on that subject? Don't you remember telling him, not lately, some time ago, that Catholics reported to Rome all their neighbors' affairs? And he swallowed the tale. He also is sure that you stole his dog!"

Peter uttered a great shout of laughter, his face at once illumined with the purest joy.

"Didn't think he had it in him!" he cried gleefully. "What do you suppose made the Diet of Worms—



please don't mind my indirect compliment to his name, Justine; it's what I call him—so keen-witted? Here's to him! Sure I remember, now, that I stuffed him with a pretty tale of our dangerous system, but I honestly didn't think he'd swallow it! What a lark!"

"Now, Peter, it's nothing of the sort," remonstrated Justine. "It's a goose, if there's any bird in the case, and you are it! Selden surely did believe it, and he seriously repeated it to Mr. J. Wesley Owen, who still more seriously told it to my father, and warned him of your menace to their affairs."

"Well, what do you know about that!" cried Peter, amazed, but still highly enjoying it. "Owen! And he told your father? What did your father say?"

"Oh, well, it may be prejudice, but I think my father is intelligent," said Justine. "He laughed at it, of course, told Mr. Owen it was absurd, and that if it had been true, it stands to reason you'd have kept it dark. Still, the other people's faith in their unfaith in you holds. There may be trouble come of it later. It doesn't soothe their feelings that father treats it as ridiculous. Why do you play that kind of prank, foolish Peter?"

"It wasn't premeditated, Justine. It was a sort of inspiration. Luther Selden was so serious, such a beautifully plowed and harrowed and watered field for that tale to be sown in! Can't you see that it seemed a shame to let the chance pass?" chuckled Peter.

"I do not!" Justine was emphatic. "They think enough that is bad of your Church, things which

may be refuted easily enough if anyone looks into it, but when you, a Catholic, tell them what they are anxious to credit, of course it goes! And I don't see why you do it."

"Defender of the Faith!" cried Peter in high delight. "Justine, you don't want the Church misrepresented!"

"I hate to have anything misrepresented," returned Justine with heightened color. "I'd take out a brief for the devil if someone attributed worse things to him than he'd do."

"You are a just creature! Odd they called you Justine! Though of course your father bore the name before you—and he is a just man, on the whole," said Peter.

"Such an extravagant statement!" Justine mocked him. "Father is 'just on the whole,' and wholly! He is willing to admit any fact, however unwelcome, that is brought to him with its credentials. Father may not act upon the fact; he is settled into his manner of life, but he will admit it, even though he defies its logical consequences. I truly think, Peter, that your nonsense will bear fruit later on, and it's going to be a nuisance."

"Sorry, Justine," said Peter, but not with proper contrition. "I don't quite see what can come of it. Selden is decent to me, enough so; he never liked me, but then I'd rather he wouldn't! Mr. Owen is balmy. He asked me to his house not long ago."

"Did you go?" asked Justine, with interest.

"Yes, ma'am, Justine. And met his rotund wife and the three Misses Owen," said Peter with a funny look.

"Hildegarde is exceedingly pretty. She is—they

don't call it engaged yet, I believe! 'Keeping company' with Luther Selden," said Justine.

"Selden came there after me; I thought they were 'keeping company'! Mr. Owen also warned me that the lovely Hildegard was not on the market," said Peter. "Miss Leona is not pretty, but she is—what shall I call it? Active, lively. The little one, Gladys, is only an embodied giggle as yet. They were all most cordial to me, Justine; they didn't seem to be afraid that I'd report my call to Father Coigne. And yet——" Peter pulled himself up short, remembering charity.

Justine laughed. "Nice Peter to keep within the law!" she said. "I know the Owens. I have often noticed that the rigor of old-fashioned Methodist and Baptist parents did not descend to their daughters."

"They danced," said Peter. "They told me that I could dance on crutches the sort of walking, et cetera, dances they did. But I didn't try it."

"You ought to go about though, Peter," said Justine. "You would be better for it, and, after a while, happier."

"I go out, Justine, and I see nice girls. There are some sweet, good, pretty girls in St. John's parish, and I like them. But there isn't enough pleasure in it to make it worth the effort. I like to talk to you, Justine; we are friends, but no one else is interesting to me. That sounds beastly conceited, but it isn't. It's myself; I lack, not the nice girls. I like them, see that they're pretty, but it is as if I sat up in Mars and looked at them from there." Peter spoke sadly, and Justine touched his hand.

"Was yesterday hard, dear Peter?" she asked softly.

"It didn't seem bad while it was going on," said Peter, with the entire frankness that he always gave to Justine. "I tried not to think, and I did manage to be numb. Circulation started after it was over. Last night was a little bit tough."

"They will be at home again by August or September, Peter," said Justine, feeling her way. "By that time you'll be able to adjust. You'll not lose Giles?"

"I am adjusted now," said Peter. "When you face a thing as final, then you soon adjust to it; what else is there to do? It is uncertainty that keeps a wound raw. I shall always love Isabelle, but I love Giles more than I do her; at least it is in a sense a deeper and a different love. Consequently there never could be in my heart a feeling for Giles' wife that is wrong. We're going to be happy friends. Don't worry over it, Justine; I'll not break the ninth commandment and covet my best friend's wife. But what it seems to have done to me, what all the experiences of the past months seem to have done, is to snap the mainspring of feeling in me; I've lost the capacity to desire anything much. It's a good thing, too! Do you know, Justine dear, I honestly believe I'm fonder of you than of anyone else, except Giles! I find you're almost as much my reliance as he is, and I've depended upon you more lately, because Giles has been too taken up to be available. We don't drift apart nowadays, dear old Disting! It's fine to get one's playmate back tenfold, isn't it? Don't you believe there's more actual value in our sort of steady-going friendship than there is in this

much-overrated falling in love?" Peter smiled his winning smile at Justine, leaning over toward her affectionately, and she returned his smile with a piteous little crooked one of her own, bending over her wheel because she felt that her smile lacked something.

"Well, Peter," said Justine, steadying her voice carefully, "I'm not qualified to decide that. You see, Peter, I never loved any man but my father, my dear, dear father; he tries so hard to help me! And you. So how can I tell? But I know that if I'm a friend whom you trust, turn to, rather like, I'm glad and thankful."

"You're that and much more, Justine dear! You're a great girl. I'm awfully fond of you, all the time seeing more to admire and like in you," cried Peter. "And the way you're unselfish, try to boost me along—well, talk about friends! No man, though they say a man's friendship for another man is the biggest thing going, could surpass you as a loyal, devoted pal."

"Oh, please, Peter!" protested Justine faintly, tried beyond her strength.

"Say, Justine, since we're talking confidences," blundering Peter went on, "what of you, yourself? I'd like to see you gloriously happy. If you only could find the man worthy of you! I'd never even try to find another half so lucky! You'd be submerged if you loved anyone as you can love, Justine, and he'd never live long enough to thank God fully for such a woman. If you were a Catholic I could see you turning to Carmel. You're the sort to go as far as you can, but always upward, Justine!"

"Oh, Peter, Peter, please!" cried Justine, with a

sob. "Why do you say, do you think such things of me? I'm only Dusting; no one at all but Justine Coburn. I'll never find the happiness you mean. I never dream of anything for myself. I'm tall, thin, plain—don't talk of me, Peter! I know about Carmel. I'd become a Catholic to go to something like that!"

"How do you know about Carmel?" asked Peter, surprised.

"I saw they'd beatified a young nun of Lisieux; they call her the Little Flower. It sounded rather sweet. I asked Father Coigne about her, and he lent me her life. It is the most unimaginable thing! I couldn't get it all at first, can't get it all now, but it enthralles me; I go back to it in thought. It's—well, it's supernatural! There's nothing in nature like that, and we outsiders lack the clue." Justine spoke rapidly, her cheeks reddening, truly enthralled, but glad to drop herself.

"You saw Father Coigne? He lent you a book? He did not tell me you had been to see him!" cried Peter.

"Of course not, when I asked him not to!" exclaimed Justine. "I am not going to be a Catholic. I don't believe enough; I couldn't trust myself—now. But I like your priest, and your Little Flower, also the new idea I've gotten of a religious life. It's all marvellous to me—but not for me! Father Coigne told me almost exactly what you did, Peter; he said nothing short of the Infinite ever would satisfy me."

"Well, Justine, you are certainly not satisfied without it," said Peter, gently.

Justine threw him an inscrutable look.

"It's not a one-sided thing, Peter," she said. "If the Infinite wants me, sees it's what I need, then it must take me. I can't find Infinity myself. I've come over to this place, Peter," she added, with a complete change of tone, and a half-laugh, "on an errand for my mother. She asked me to drive here, if I had no special point in view. Mother has heard of a chiropractor over here, also a mental healer, and I'm to get the cards of them both, and report to her which is the more refined——"

"What is the matter with your mother, exactly, Justine? I never heard," cried Peter.

"I wouldn't like to say, Peter; you might think I was wrong—you would think I was wrong to say it!" Justine this time looked mischievous when she laughed. "She has no positive disease; in fact her trouble is negative. Mother would be all right if I had nine little brothers and sisters, and she took in washing! Don't you think there are lots of women who not only don't crave the Infinite, but most awfully miss and suffer for the lack of the finite?"

Peter echoed Justine's laugh.

"You see straight, my Aspirant for Mount Carmel!" he cried. "I suppose you can't help seeing in any and every direction! Let's bet on the chiro-man and the mental healer; which do you bet will be more impressive?"

"I'll choose the mental-man; I'd rather like anyone who could straighten out my mind," said Justine, promptly.

"Chiro for me!" cried Peter. "A box of candy, \$1.50 per pound limit, for the loser to pay if the other candidate is preferable."

"It wouldn't take much for me to choose neither, and that would also be economy," suggested Justine, being a person of resource.

Peter and she laughed gaily. They had talked seriously, with deep feeling, but they were young, laughter welcome, and the laughter drew them together more than the seriousness had done.



## CHAPTER XVII.

*"That Daffed the World Aside, and Bid It Pass."*

THE summer passed Peter by, as it passed over him, somewhat more swiftly than he had feared that it would. It was an unusually warm summer, which increased Peter's weariness in getting about; he availed himself of this additional excuse for going out less and less. He managed to get to Mass again on week days, perhaps thrice a week; Dominico faithfully accompanying him.

"And I do not think it's so bad to go, Mr. Peter," said Dominico, with his large-eyed, simple candor. "At first it was for you—but that of course I had to like. Now I think it's not one bit bad to hear a Mass in the week, when you don't have to save your soul. I think it makes the lonely Lord smile, and say: 'See that fellow? He thinks about Me, not just himself because he's afraid to stay home—like Sunday!' And I like to answer back: 'Yes, kind Jesus, I do think on You. I'm glad I have to take care of Mr. Peter, and come here. It's like giving You a present extra, not when it's Christmas, or Your festa.'"

"You've got the idea, Dominicino!" cried Peter, slapping Dominico on the back delightedly. "You've come into your inheritance. It takes the Latins and the French to put it in the right terms."

Peter kept up his hour of adoration on Thursday nights; he found himself dependent upon it. The stillness, the sense of night all around him in the

dimly lighted church, the thoughts which came to him then, sustained Peter through the seven days of each passing week. Peter knew that he was growing more and more apart from his kind, not in the wholesome spirit of the saints, but as if his soul were becoming enclosed in a case impenetrable to interests, as if, Daphne-like, bark were growing over him, but without green branches at the top to prove that, interiorly, life was springing.

There were no changes in his daily business life. So far from Justine's warning being needed, Peter found the two younger partners, Mr. Owen and Roscoe Fitts, warmly trying to be his friends. They were cultivating the young clerk, each in his way, inviting him out, or, in Mr. Owen's case, to his house; going out of their way to tell him something interesting or entertaining, or what they considered so.

Luther Selden showed his dislike merely by withdrawing from Peter, treating him civilly, but no more than that. This suited Peter so perfectly that he welcomed it as an unexpected proof of Selden's perception, with which he had not credited him, and for the most part so thoroughly ignored Luther Selden that he was happily able to forget him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Giles Guernsey had returned from nearly a half year in France, and a short stay in England," the *Woodcock Events* chronicled truthfully this fact. The deferred wedding reception, now a house opening, had been given. The new house was finished, and Giles had brought over from France all the furniture for the lower floor. It was a beautiful house; no other in Woodcock could contest its supremacy in perfection of design, though

many others were more costly.

Peter had not been certain how he should adjust to the resumption of his old-new relations with Isabelle and Giles. He could not foretell his own reactions when he should meet them. It had gone far better than he had dared to hope that it would. This was due in part to Peter's numbness, which nothing seemed fully to penetrate, but more to the subtle changes in both Giles and Isabelle, though more in her than in him, which precluded personal claims upon her.

Giles was fast getting to be first of all things a married man. He was no less fond of Peter; he had been almost overwhelmed when they first met again with both joy and pity. He confided in Peter, sought him, enjoyed him, was boyish and comradely, but his mind turned constantly to Isabelle; he often started to quote "my wife" to Peter, substituted her name, but still quoted her. He brooded over her in his thoughts, planning for her, how to take care of her, to see that she had no ungratified wish. He was a polarized Giles now.

Of Isabelle all this was true a thousandfold increased, it seemed to Peter. She was maternally; she mothered everyone, old and young. Her pretty ways were still hers, but they were rather as if they were allowed to continue because other people liked them than as if they were now the involuntary outflowing of her youth.

Isabelle reflected her sense of vast experience, peculiar to herself, not common to all the race. She was intensely happy, but remotely sweet, as if she sat apart and was kind, like an enshrined saint. And Peter could not get near enough to the real Isabelle

to feel his wound stabbing acutely, which was a desirable, though unforeseen state of things.

He went oftener to the young Guernsey's house than anywhere else. He had his own room there, and often stayed over night. Giles and Isabelle vied with each other in making him feel how dearly they loved him, and wanted him, but Peter knew that they turned, even from him, to each other when he closed his door, glad to be alone.

This increased Peter's sense of being buried alive; he was beginning to feel that he no longer existed; a most bewildering, benumbing feeling of separation settled upon him. He had the queer sensation when he talked to people of having left his maimed body to talk and be seen for him, while he had gone afar, he did not know where. It was the second and most dangerous stage of Peter's adjusting to the calamity which had overtaken him, one that those who loved him—Father Coigne, Isabelle, Giles, perhaps most of all Justine, saw with fear, knowing that it must be broken up if they were to keep their Peter.

It seemed to Isabelle when her little son was born in March, that no one could have done for Peter what she had done in asking him to be the child's godfather, little Peter's godfather! She thus endowed him with a third of this wonder child, like no other baby who had, in all the ages, been born to another young mother, whom from the first she had meant should be Peter's consoler, largely his possession. Peter was exceedingly pleased with little Peter and his relation to him, he touched him delicately, lovingly; Isabelle noted with her mother keenness, and profound pity, that big Peter especially liked to cuddle little Peter's feet in his hand. But Peter did

not improve as Isabelle had expected him to, thus enriched; she spoke to Father Coigne of her disappointment, troubled, but tempted to be annoyed. Why should anybody go sadly, now that baby, this marvelous baby, was in the world?

"Oh, Isabelle, child, can't you understand?" cried the priest, who had renounced so completely. "I'd think you'd see it, you who have so much, and hold it so intensely! Peter wants, he craves his own. You give him what you can out of your riches, but the largess is not endowing. One must renounce all things for God to be content with barrenness. Peter is in the world, but in all the world there is nothing that is vitally his. Poor Peter! I wish he had a vocation!"

"And what he could have he won't take, doesn't perceive!" cried Isabelle. "I don't like mixed marriages, but Peter's case is different."

"Well, my dear, that particular marriage would not be mixed, unless you use the word in the sense of mingle," said Father Coigne, with his twinkle. "I think one thing that holds her back is her honesty; she is afraid of being influenced by her love, her longing to make Peter happy, as her coming in would do. Consequently she doesn't make him happy, and what is more, continues unhappy herself! That's a great character! I admire her tremendously. That one thing alone shows how honest she is. Of course she stands so straight that she bends backward; it's foolish, but it is a by-product of nobility. I don't mean there's nothing bothering her; there is, but it would come right, if she weren't so deadly afraid of acting to please Peter."

"Justine would be the crown of Peter's life! She

is a glorious girl! I could shake him! I never saw such blindness! I *will* shake him, too, if I can find the way to shake him awake!" cried Isabelle, impatiently.

"Now, hands off, Mistress Guernsey!" cried Father Coigne. "Don't you meddle. I've lived long enough, and seen enough to leave people to themselves, also to let God arrange things. There's no one in all the world has such a doubt of God Almighty's competence to see her friends mated, if it's best, as has a happy young matron! Pray for Peter, but sit tight; that's my advice!"

Isabelle laughed, burying her face in little Peter's violet-scented breast till he chuckled.

"I'm so thankful, so happy, Father!" she cried. "And there's no reason why Peter should not be as happy as we are. Anyone would love him, anyone be proud of him!"

"He's Peter the Great! my poor Peter the Great! And yet he's doing fairly well; he's better than I feared he'd be when it happened," said the priest, rising to go.

Father Coigne thought long and seriously upon Peter's case, turning over in his mind one and another suggestion for his welfare which occurred to him, dismissing them. He saw that Peter's help must come through his being helpful; he must arouse him out of his dangerous lethargy by giving him a task which would demand a great deal from him, make him realize that he was doing a great deal for someone else.

"And most of all he must have something that is his, that he loves and that loves him. I do wish it were Justine Coburn, but if he doesn't see her for

himself it proves that, for him, she's not there to be seen. Perhaps if I got him started at loving something else he'd turn to her later. Love is an inflammable thing; it runs along from point to point like a prairie fire. It's not the person who loves many who can't love another; it's the selfish creature that never loves truly anyone but himself who concentrates, is limited. I'd be delighted if Peter would go into an Order. He'd be a happy monk. But I can't say that it's his place. What can his place be, my Peter the Great?"

Thus Father Coigne's thoughts ran along, without bringing him nearer to a solution, till, unexpectedly, the solution seemed to the priest to be given directly to him, as happens occasionally when the need is great.

Father Coigne came to Peter's house one night, walking rapidly, looking elated. He found Peter alone, with Canis Major close to him, beside a low fire which a chilling May rain rendered necessary for comfort.

"Sit still, Peter!" cried the priest, raising a prohibitive hand when Peter started to rise. "Are you alone? Where's Dominico?"

"He went over to the Claw," replied Peter. "Yes, Father, I'm alone; Mrs. Riordan is out, too. Someone she knew is dead; I forget who she said it was."

"Matthias Roache. He's a far-off cousin of that Micky you like so well, down at your place of business; Mrs. Riordan's cousin was married to him," said Father Coigne. "I'm glad to find you alone, Peter, because I have something to lay before you, a job for you to undertake, that needs discussing. It would be better for no one but ourselves to learn

the ins and outs of it, and Dominico might innocently overhear what I'm going to tell you. Peter, what about adopting a baby, a boy baby?"

"Good heavens, Father Coigne!" cried Peter, almost forgetting that he could not stand, starting as if to his feet. "Me! Not me! What's the joke? Because I'm godfather to little Peter Giles?"

"Not a bit of it! Peter has enough and to spare of loving care. And I certainly do mean you. I'm proposing that you take as your own a little chap, a few weeks younger than your godson, who has no one in all this world that wants him, and no one to look after him, except our Sisters, in an institution. He's a fine, healthy little child, and I think, Peter, it would be an act that would bring down Heaven's blessing on you, while it gave the small creature the earthly blessings he sorely lacks," said Father Coigne, speaking fast.

"Father Coigne," began Peter slowly, staring at the priest, "you seem to mean it! You actually seem to mean it! How could I adopt a child?"

"I spoke to Mrs. Riordan about it this afternoon, not telling her particulars, but suggesting that I knew a baby who needs what you could give him, and that I thought he would give you quite as much," said Father Coigne, whose way was not to be caught unawares. "Mrs. Riordan was hoighty-toighty for the plan, said a baby would be no trouble in the house, on the contrary that she would rejoice in having him. She said, 'It does be awful still when he's gone, an' no one but the dog, or the Eyetalyan around.' She further said that her own young niece would come to help with the baby, if you took him. So there's that! You have a good salary, Peter, and



though I know you give more than a tithe away, still you could give less, and provide for your adopted son."

"My son!" exclaimed Peter, involuntarily.

"Your son, now about six weeks old. He is not baptized, the little heathen, so you may even choose his name. I'd like Miss Coburn to be godmother, but we must ask Isabelle, since Justine persists in keeping that foolish '*non*' ahead of her proper title of Catholic!" Father Coigne smiled. "Naturally you'll be his godfather, to establish a real kinship."

"Father Coigne, you take my breath away with all these details, as if it were a settled thing!" gasped Peter.

"Why shouldn't it be, Peter? You've got a chance to do a fine deed, permanently fine, yet daily renewed in mercy! Why should you hesitate?" demanded Father Coigne.

He saw with satisfaction that the mere suggestion had shaken up Peter as nothing else had done.

"Who's child is it?" asked Peter.

"Ah, there, Peter, is the question which you have a right to ask, and to receive the answer, but the answer no one else must ever know," said Father Coigne. "The mother is a slip of a girl, seventeen years old. There is no secret about her; the baby was born in a hospital. She is a good girl; she has always been an innocent, good girl; she is one of my own flock. The trouble with her has been that she was not only innocent, but ignorant. She is willing to keep her baby and support him, but she cannot. Her father is dead, her mother is cruelly hard on her, and will not allow her to come home if she brings the baby. If she disposes of him, the girl may continue

her old life. Heaven help the poor little thing, it will be a hard one! But I think it may be a short one; she is not well. The child's father is known to me, but only under the seal of the most solemn secrecy; I cannot tell you who he is. He is the girl's superior—save the mark! That is to say he is a man of mature years, social position, is well-to-do. I could force him to support the girl, even to marry her; she could be made to release me from my pledge of secrecy. But if I did this, the child would grow up a heathen, and the little mother, likely, lose her soul. The best that I can do for her is to teach her how to mend the harm—it came from her respect for this man, her complete ignorance, and her mother's hard way of not winning her confidence—and lead her to heaven, where I think she'll soon go. And the best I can do for the baby is to give him to you, Peter! The mother will renounce all claim to him when I satisfy her that he is to be well brought up and loved. When I tell her that Peter Cassett takes him—Well, she'll see that I spoke truly when I told her not to fret, that God loved her baby and her, pitying them both."

"Father Coigne, what a good man you are!" cried Peter involuntarily.

"You're not half bad, my Peter the Great! If I didn't trust you and think well of you, would I give over to you this little soul?" retorted Father Coigne. "He's a lovely child, and that is the truth, and not to urge my goods upon you, Prospective Buyer! He is sound and happy, sleeps and eats, and cries just enough, and he's as pretty as a cherub, in spite of his being so young that he might be pardoned for being ugly now! I'll tell you something, if you won't be-

tray me! He's better looking than young Guernsey! It's saying nothing to say he has blue eyes, since they all have, like kittens, to begin with, but he has features, and nice ones. You'll be proud of your boy, Peter the Great!"

"Oh!" cried Peter, thrilled by the word, yet afraid of it. Then he added with his own smile, which was seldom seen of late:

"Canis Major will be hurt, Father; he'll feel deposed."

"Nothing of the sort! Canis Major will take the baby into his devoted heart and help you with him, Peter, if I know Canis." Father Coigne patted the dog who rose and came to him, hearing his name. "Think of teaching your own boy to play ball, showing him that curved pitch of yours! Peter, don't you think life would be made over for you if you made yours over to a little child?"

"I could teach him to walk," said Peter quietly.

"Is it settled?" asked Father Coigne, half rising.

Peter put out a detaining hand.

"You'll let me have the night to think it over, Father? It has bowled me down; it's a big proposition you've made me. I have enough money to support him decently. But the responsibility, and especially for me! And a nurse girl, besides Mrs. Rioridan and Dominico? Almost a retinue, comparatively speaking," Peter outlined his points of objection.

"Take till the day after to-morrow to consider it, Peter, though there's nothing to wait for, and if you weren't to take him I'd have to begin to correspond with our asylums. Don't lose the chance, Peter the Great; don't send the baby off to be one among three or four hundred ownerless children," said Father

Coigne. "As to responsibility, you'd take far more if you married. As to the retinue, defer it; it would be but the nurse girl more, anyway. I think you'll do what I ask, Peter the Great. What will you name him?"

"My father and mother, both, were named John—John and Jean," said Peter so promptly that he revealed the fact that his mind had been travelling this way.

No better name, John is one of the few names which can't be cheapened," the priest approved him. "John Cassett."

"Yes, but they'd call him Jack. The boys in school would call him Jack Cassett! That would never do; see the opening it would give for unmerciful teasing? The kid would have to do up all the rest of the school!" cried Peter with a laugh.

"See the advantage of having an adopted father who is not far beyond boyhood?" said Father Coigne. "Trust you to foresee the opprobrious nickname! What then is his name, Peter?"

"Robert?" suggested Peter.

"Why Robert?" asked Father Coigne.

"I think the answer to that is: 'Why not?' Father!" said Peter. "It's a nice name; I always liked it, and Bob, or Rob would be all right. Robert Esperance—that all right?"

"Esperance! Yes, oh, yes, Peter the Great, that's more than all right! And you'll have him, the small, new-born Hope?" asked Father Coigne gently.

"I suppose I shall not know any more about it later," said Peter slowly. "Yes, Father, since you urge it. And I suppose I need him. Do you mean a legal adoption? He'll be—mine, my own—son?"

"Your very own, Peter! Natural fatherhood rarely makes a child so truly a man's own as this boy will be yours. It will be fatherhood consecrated by a twofold need. God bless it, and bless you and little Robert Esperance, Peter the Great!" said the priest with a catch in his throat and a bright smile as he put out his hand and left Peter alone to the marvel of what had happened.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*"There Are No Tricks in Plain and Simple Faith."*

PETER spent the next day in a maze, at one minute withdrawing mentally from his agreement; the next minute straining at the barriers of time and delay which retarded the coming of the baby. He was impatient for evening when he might consult Giles and Isabelle, with Justine, or rather announce to them what he had undertaken; he was pledged to Father Coigne for the welfare of the baby. He must at least go on with the experiment, even if it proved disastrous; in that case the child would be handed over to the Sisters and be no worse off for the interlude in which he was taken experimentally. But no; it was to be a legal adoption! Perhaps he would do well to defer having the papers made out which would make him permanently responsible for this little life?

But then the child would still be subject to his mother's claim; she might change her mind, might become able to do so through some unforeseen circumstances. Father Coigne thought she was not carelessly shirking responsibility but wanted to keep her baby. He would get the papers made out when he took the baby. Thus all day, while he was carefully, but automatically examining and testing the delicate little instruments under his charge, Peter went over and over the ground, debating, anticipating, dreading the coming of his adopted boy.

When he returned to his house somewhat earlier

than usual, he at once telephoned Justine, and asked her to drive him out to Woodcock Links that evening.

"I've a great thing to tell you, Justine, and I want you to hear it with Giles and his wife; I want to see how it strikes you three at the same time," he said, and hung up without giving Justine any clue to his news.

Peter sought advice from Mrs. Riordan and Dominico, and received it so easily that it did not help him; evidently they both considered a child more or less nothing to lose sleep over.

"I told Father Coigne I'd do my best for 'um, and you," said Mrs. Riordan. "What is there to worry over? Sure it's homeless he'd be but for you takin' 'um, an' however good the Sisters be's to 'um, it's a home we're all wantin', let us be big or little! An' you'll see he learns his catechism when the time comes. Sure I don't see a thing to be fussin' about at all, Mr. Peter, but a good thing for you 'twill be, as well as for that baby."

Dominico's ideas were not unlike Mrs. Riordan's.

"I will do all I can to help you, Mr. Cassett," he said. "I'm used to children; I'm the eldest of five, the rest born in this country. I think there is nothing sweeter than a child, and you will teach yours such goodness that he will grow up like the Bambino, the Child who was God on earth. I do not see why you fear him; he is very little and when he grows big enough to be naughty he will have learned to be good every day he grew, so—" Dominico extended his hands, shrugged his shoulders, bent his fingers back and downward to signify that there was nothing upon which anxiety should take hold. "For me I think it is beautiful to have a child around, nor would I ever

spank him, as some do, but take him in my arms and say: *Caro Figlio*, my little son, you are too dear to me to hurt me!" Again Dominico spread his hands, this time clearly conveying the wondrous effect of this appeal upon the unknown child. "What is a little boy, one little boy?" Dominico added, concluding his argument. "One day when you marry, Mr. Peter, this one will melt into your family, and you will not feel him there."

At Woodcock Links Peter and Justine, when she drove Peter there early in the evening, found Giles and Isabelle in a high state of enthusiastic excitement over the adoption of Robert Esperance; they already knew of the plan.

"Father Coigne has been here and bribed the jury! Not that it matters as to the jury's verdict; I have to go ahead with the thing now, anyway," said Peter.

"He was not here, Peter, but he did drop into Giles' office and tell him about it," Isabelle corrected him. "You surely know that I needed no bribing to render my inevitable verdict! I haven't been so happy over anything in ages, at least not since little Peter was born! Oh, Peter dear, he will have a little brother, hardly a month younger, almost his twin! We will bring them up as much together as we can, won't we? Lay them in the same cradle and pledge their love to each other, like the dear Saint Elizabeth, and Louis! I wish you'd call your baby Giles! He isn't baptized yet; why won't you? Then we'd have another Peter and Giles growing up to love each other first and best!"

"I didn't like to suggest it," said Peter beaming on Isabelle, for the first time without consciousness of past regrets. "The baby—well, he isn't my child,



you know, and I didn't feel sure you'd want him to have Giles' name. If you do, why, Giles Esperance he'll be! I'd hate to chuck the Esperance!"

"Hang on to Esperance, Pete old Hermit; whether you call it Esperance or Hope, hang on to it!" cried Giles.

Justine was almost silent while the rapid, happy discussion of Peter's acquisition went on. She had uttered a sharp cry of joy and surprise when she was told of it, but she contributed few words to the articulate approval of the others. Her face shone with pleasure, yet with something deeper and higher than pleasure. A soft radiance lighted it; her eyes were big and dark with emotion; her lips wore a smile as still and mysterious as the brooding smile of a mother.

Several times Isabelle looked at her and looked away with an impulse to tears for great-hearted Justine. It was Peter's child that was in question; his adopted son, but his child, the little creature whose tiny hands were to lift from him the cloud which Justine would gladly have died to lift, but which effectually shut her out. Isabelle directed Peter's eyes to Justine more than once by an appeal which she must answer, as he must receive that answer. Justine looked actually beautiful with her soul thus shining out of her wonderful eyes. Isabelle was determined that Peter should see her thus, but though he looked at her when Isabelle directed him to her, Isabelle was not sure that Peter really saw Justine.

"You haven't said much, Justine," Peter said to her as they drove home. "Yet you give me the feeling that you approve even more than Giles and Isabelle do, at least I feel as though your approval went far-

ther—I don't know how to express it!" Justine smiled on Peter gently, quietly.

"I am profoundly happy, Peter," she said. "Not since you were hurt have I felt as I do now about you, about many things. I will say 'Thank God,' just as you say it, dear Peter, when I am quite sure that God is in it. And I am beginning to see Him at work in the world, in our lives. I think I may one day see a reason for your injury, though that surely seemed more than impossible."

"Don't try to see reasons, Justine. You can't always see them, not even after a long time. I don't see how we can expect to understand Infinite Wisdom! See God, Justine, and don't try to see His reasons." As he spoke Peter smiled at her his charming smile, now affectionate and elder brotherly. "I wish you could be the baby's godmother, Justine, but you see it has to be someone who would bring him up a Catholic, if I died and left him unfinished."

"I would do that, Peter," said Justine. "Do you think that I would not?"

"You surely would, Honorable Justine," said Peter. "You'd keep any pledge you ever made, but you see you couldn't do it yourself; you'd have to be a second-hand godmother, so to speak, able only to make sure someone else gave the instruction which you could not give. It has to be Isabelle, but I'd ever so much rather it were you. However, if I died Isabelle would take the baby right into her own nursery, with her boy. He'd get all he needed there."

"But I wouldn't! I'd need the baby, Peter," said Justine sadly. "I'm sorry I'm a heathen, but I'll be an honest one, though I have to die a heathen and lie outside your consecrated ground. I think you need

not talk of dying, Peter; you are strong, young, and have much to do before you are old."

"Well, Justine, I'll tell you something!" said Peter. "I've been dead for a long time. I've felt as though my body went about, but that I was gone. It's a mighty queer feeling! And now, since I made up my mind to see this baby through, I'll be blessed if I haven't suddenly come to life! I'm right on deck, handling all the baggage!"

"Oh, Peter, don't you know that you have to have an object in life? Father Coigne is rescuing more than one boy, dear Peter!" cried Justine, her voice thrilled with tender pity.

Little Giles Esperance Cassett was made a reluctant Christian by Father Coigne on the third day after Peter's decision to adopt him. Peter did not feel competent to pronounce upon him, except that it was a relief to find him white of tint; not an unattractive red as even Isabelle's wonderful little Peter surely was at this stage of his career. But the women who were versed in the requirements for a young baby to be awarded a blue ribbon, judged Master Giles as one hundred per cent perfect, and perfectly beautiful, so Peter was more than satisfied.

The poor little mother Peter did not see. She signed the papers which relinquished her child to Peter, in a lawyer's office, and disappeared.

"The child has good blood in him, Peter," said Father Coigne. "Even the father, though he is a sinner, is of respectable stock, and the mother surely is. I only hope the baby may not inherit his maternal grandmother's brand of respectability, which maintains all the requirements of civilization, and forbids the young mother to keep her child."

The baby was installed in Peter's house. Peter explained to Canis Major that this in no wise lessened his master's love for him, but that Peter counted upon Canis to help him to keep safe, and also to keep in his place, this small person whose aimless hands clutched Canis Major's hair tighter than was pleasant. Canis Major understood; he also adopted the baby as his charge. Mrs. Riordan overflowed upon little Giles, catching him to her broad breast and rocking him the while she sang to him songs of incredible minor wailing.

Dominico enthroned the baby upon his shoulder and in his heart the instant that his eyes fell upon him, but Peter had had no doubt of Dominico's attitude; it is a rare Italian who fails in love to a little child.

So Peter was alone no more. It seemed to him past credence that he heard a baby's cry in his house, that he came upon a baby's bottles drying in the sunshine on a window sill, "to sweeten them," Mrs. Riordan said, before sterilization, in which she had limited faith. The young nurse girl had not yet come.

"Sure what do I want of a nurse girl at all, while he's that young that all you have to do is to feed 'um an' drop 'um down in safety, or put 'um on one arrum, while you stir, or lift, as may be?" she demanded impatiently.

Peter soon saw that Mrs. Riordan was going to be jealous of anyone but herself—and Peter, whose claim she allowed—touching small Giles Esperance.

The best thing about the baby, so far, was that he remained at home with Canis Major all day, ready to be returned to at night. Peter realized this virtue

in him in a few days. He was too young to welcome Peter, but he was there, warm and alive, and Peter liked to imagine that the queer crooked way that he pulled his mouth when Peter tickled his incredibly soft cheek with his finger tip, was a personal smile for himself.

Mr. Owen and Mr. Fitts met Peter when he came down to business on the fourth morning after little Giles' adoption.

"We hear great news of you, Peter!" said Mr. Fitts jovially. "Extraordinary thing for a youngster like you to do, but not bad, not half bad! Hope it works out well."

"Thanks; so do I. The little chap and I need each other, so perhaps it will. I'm not too sanguine," said Peter.

"Mr. Coburn spoke of it; he approved heartily," said Mr. Owen. "Peter Cassett, he's a fine man! Yes, yes! Come into my office; we want to speak to you particularly."

Peter followed the partners into J. Wesley Owen's private office, and swung himself into a chair at his bidding.

"As we were saying," Mr. Owen began as if there had been no pause, "Justin Coburn is a fine man. But would you have thought, till you knew him well, that he was too idealistic for his own good—and ours, and ours?"

Peter shook his head, but before he could answer Roscoe Fitts took up the theme.

"You must have thought, you must see, how foolishly, at what loss our partner runs this business? We have hesitated to speak to you, but you must see," he said.

"Loss?" echoed Peter. "Coburn, Owen and Fitts running at a loss? Justin Coburn impractical?"

"Precisely. You are too keen to have missed what we are about to put up to you as an improvement," said Roscoe Fitts, pretending to take Peter's derisive exclamation as assent. "He wastes on expenses and cuts down profit to an incalculable, but considerable extent, as you know."

"Pardon me, but I do not know that at all, and it never occurred to me to speculate on the way this business is run. I was hired to inspect the instruments, not Mr. Coburn," said Peter.

"Quite cleverly put, Peter; really well said, and the obviously correct answer, till you get on to what we're after," said Roscoe Fitts. "But see here; here's the thing. We buy the best, the most expensive, that's to say, materials on the market. We could manufacture at half—well, to be conservative we'll say one-third the cost, if we used other stuff which would answer our purpose as well, better, in fact! We would sell at present prices, and our profits would leap, simply bound—like a chamois on the Alps!" Fitts laughed and waited for Peter's smile, which did not come.

"There you are, Peter Cassett! Roscoe puts it briefly, but you can see what it would mean; in a general way you can see, though you can't reckon it accurately. Wealth, my boy, that's what it would mean, rapidly gained—get-rich-quick, you know!" Mr. Owen beamed as if this, too, were humorous.

Peter started to speak, checked himself, then said, with the guard he put upon his tongue audible and visible:

"I don't get the idea. I see you'd make profit,

double may be, till your buyers got on to your deterioration, but after that? Your stuff would be dead on the market."

"After that, Peterkins? After that a car and winters on the Riviera for yours truly, rolling around Europe in a rolling Rolls-Royce! There wouldn't be any afterward. Let the things die on the market, or anywhere they like; what do we care when we've made our pile? Don't you see that it's just as Owen says, getting rich quick? We should worry when we've retired!" Roscoe Fitts cried joyously.

"Why do you tell me this? It's a queer thing to confide to a white man. Where do I come in?" asked Peter, his wrath almost slipping its leash.

"There you are, Peter Cassett!" cried J. Wesley Owen as if Peter had shown superhuman intelligence. "There—you—are! In with us! You'll have your pile out of it, not so big as ours, partners in the concern, but enough, enough! You can send that boy you've taken to Yale and Harvard at the same time, if you want to! What you do is to keep on inspecting and pass the instruments made from the inferior material; I know Coburn, and it won't reach him, with you still inspecting, till the thing is done. We can keep it up a good while. We've attended to the factory inspector; we'll put a new man in there, and he'll be Luther Selden. I guess that'll show you! All you're to do is to pass the output, same's ever, and we guarantee that you shall tot up your profit with six figures, if it runs two or three years, as it will."

"At first there will be only a slight falling off in orders, when they begin to get wise," Roscoe Fitts took up the explanation, "and the old man won't

know that it's more than chance. He's dead wrong anyway; he's daffy on the subject of keeping our output up to about ten points above par. Rot!"

"Mr. Coburn is prejudiced in favor of honesty, even favors honor!" observed Peter.

"Honesty!" cried Fitts. "See here, Cassett, don't get to insinuating! Honesty is all very fine, but you don't want to get hipped on it. There's business honesty, and honesty in story books, read by your ma when you're in knickers! We have a right to manufacture out of whatever we please, and the public can take it or leave it. We don't compel them to buy; we run our affairs for ourselves; so do the rest of the business world. You take up our offer, and we'll see that you make a hundred thousand in three years. Don't you be a fool! Aren't we two-thirds of the firm? Why not leave things in our hands? Coburn will profit as much as we by our better sense."

"I never liked fractions," said Peter. "Maybe I don't reckon right, but I'd reduce this concern to lower fractions than thirds; I'd make it hundreds, and give Mr. Coburn 97% of the brains and ability of this firm. Who started it and made it a big thing, I wonder?"

"Are you balking?" demanded Roscoe Fitts fiercely. "Do you realize that we'll all be on Easy Street?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Peter, smiling winningly, though his eyes were black and flashing, "Easy Street in this case is laid out on too sharp an incline for me, with my crutches; the other end is in hell fire, and this end is slippery. Mr. Coburn trusts me; you overlook that little fact."

"Are you failing him when you go against his



stupid prejudices, and work for his interests, you idiot!" cried Mr. Fitts.

"Oh, come, come, Peter; we trust you, too!" cried J. Wesley Owen affectionately. "You won't fail us? You won't spoil our chance—and your chance, my boy,—to turn over a fine pile and no harm done? When this business closes out, if the market doesn't keep on with our stuff in the new material, what's wrong? We'll all be solid by then, Coburn, too, and are we to sacrifice for a special grade of material? Stuff and nonsense!"

"You don't number the Commandments as we do; I don't know what you call our seventh, but you haven't cut it out altogether, have you? Thou shalt not steal?" inquired Peter, whose tongue had the happy faculty of getting slower and clearer when he was thoroughly aroused.

"None of that!" cried Roscoe Fitts, springing to his feet. "Any man who dares to insinuate that I'm not straight in all my dealings, I'll knock him down, whether he's a cripple or not! In *all* my dealings, you young blackguard, and that's more than you can say! Why are you so beautifully loyal to Justin Coburn? Do you put the *e* on his name, when you stand by him? He lets the girl have her head, so far, but do you think he'd let her marry you, *you?*" Roscoe Fitts glanced downward significantly as he spoke.

"You have the distinction of being the first man in Woodcock who has not respected my misfortune, Mr. Fitts," said Peter, white to the lips, and clutching one of his crutches, half lifting it. "If you would insult my lameness, I might expect that you would drag the name of my employer's daughter into an interview in which you bribe me to betray him. Stick

to the subject in hand, if you please. A cripple I am, but your project would cripple me more than that train did. I am not a thief."

"You—you!" Fitts sprang toward Peter, but J. Wesley Owen dragged him back.

"We did not ask you to steal, Peter," he said mildly. "You will see on reflection that we did not ask you to steal. Roscoe, you are wrong, you are entirely wrong! Why, oh, why are you such a passionate man? Why have you not learned self-control? You are insulting Peter twice over. He is not aiming to marry Justine. He thinks he ought to stand by Justin Coburn. He'll see how truly we are serving his best good. Really, Peter, you are wrong too, but nobly wrong, nobly wrong! Roscoe will see it later; don't mind his flying out; he's a hot-blooded man. You are nobly wrong because you act as you think right; the wrong is in what you think. Now take a day and a night to reflect upon it, two nights, in fact; don't consider this closed till the day after to-morrow. Go home and look at that little child which we hear you have taken—everybody wonders whose child it is, Peter?—and consider that you have it in your power to give him every educational advantage, and leave him a fortune that is sufficient, *sufficient*, you know, when you die! Think that this may be done while you are serving Mr. Coburn's best interest. When it is all over, Peter, he will bless you for having done this, that you kept the facts from him; he'd have to admit that he would have spoiled it if he had known it at the time, and that it had been wonderfully good that he had not known it. Think it over well, and prayerfully, Peter, prayerfully, till the day after to-morrow, and help

us, my boy, for the good of everyone concerned—us, and Mr. Coburn, and you, *you*, Peter!” All the time he was urging his pacific doctrine upon Peter, Mr. Owen was patting him on the back, till Peter was raging. Of the two he preferred Roscoe Fitts’ insults.

“For the love of heaven, J. Wesley Owen, do you think I have the colic?” Peter burst out, throwing the rotund little man from him with the violence with which he seized his crutches and got upon them. “I’m late to begin my inspection. Let me tell you once for all that you can’t bribe me, nor you can’t bully me, and you can’t pat me like a cat, into doing your abominable will! I won’t take till the day after to-morrow to consider it; I won’t take a second; it can’t get into my brain to be considered! What in the devil do you take me for? For what you are? When a thing’s impossible, what is there to discuss? You ask me to do what is beyond the impossible, you curs!”

“Take care! Respect to your employers!” cried Fitts.

“Respect! To men bribing me to betray Mr. Coburn’s trust, wreck his business? Good heavens! Let me out of here; the air is worse than sewer gas!” cried Peter, shoving the door with his crutch and fiercely swinging through it.

## CHAPTER XIX

*"Take Note, Take Note, O World, to Be Direct  
and Honest Is Not Safe."*

THE remainder of that day was not easy to Peter Cassett. He went on with his work of inspection steadily, but of course his thoughts dwelt on the extraordinary interview of that morning. He could not understand it, why the two men, Owen and Fitts, had thought that he might be vulnerable to such a scheme, why they had risked laying it before him.

"I'm not going to report it to Mr. Coburn. While I'm here they can't put it over; I'd see it if they worked in inferior materials. I won't warn him—and yet! They have no business in this concern—nor any other! The more I think of it, the madder I get!" Peter told himself, thinking in definite form of words, as he had fallen into the habit of doing while he was in the hospital, and later, while convalescing. With the burning indignation which he felt against the partners' perfidy, went on a sub-current of comment on Roscoe Fitts' insolence in connection with Justine Coburn. Though Peter did not formulate his thoughts of this, they were sufficiently vivid to make him uncomfortable and still more profoundly angry.

"Curs!" Peter muttered, knocking a box out of his way with one of his crutches, and as he did so he looked up to see Justin Coburn before him, smiling at him.

"I've sought you out in your own lair, Peter," he

said, "and you look savage enough to make the word fitting. Anything wrong?"

"No, Mr. Coburn, not yet," said Peter. "And it's not a thing, but a person or two, if it gets to be wrong."

"You sound oracular, more like a sybil than Peter, the Apostle!" Mr. Coburn looked at Peter affectionately. "I came to see you, Peter, because several days often pass without our meeting. I've heard of your plunge into charity; that is a fine action, Peter Cassett, and I wanted to say I thought that it was."

"Did——" Peter hesitated.

"Justine tell me? Yes," Mr. Coburn finished his question and answered it. "Justine thinks you have drawn a prize among babies, but I discount her. You would not pick her out as one of the intensely baby-loving women, but I hardly know how a baby could contrive to look unattractive to her eyes! Whatever the child may be, it is what you are that I'm thinking about. You're a fine fellow, Peter Cassett; I honor you and am proud of the way you're meeting your issues."

"Well, Mr. Coburn!" remonstrated Peter. "That's nothing to do! You see I'm a little lonely, and when Father Coigne put it up to me, arguments, etc., after the first scare, I warmed my feet at his register, and stood pat. I didn't think that was going to be such an inappropriate figure of speech, but I suppose one may allude to cold feet, in a slang sense, even when his own feet are cut off?"

"Don't mind me, don't think me impertinent," Mr. Coburn spoke with an embarrassed awkwardness totally unlike him. "Are you going to be lonely always, Peter? Don't you realize that a fine woman

could love you as few men are loved, and that the finer she were, the truer this would be?"

"No, Mr. Coburn, I surely do not!" cried Peter. "A cripple, double amputation! The kind of woman I would marry would not consider me, and I would not marry a nurse; I'd rather hire a nurse, if I needed one, than humiliate a fine woman. There's no longer possibility for me of what's called happiness. Maybe that baby will grow up to be chummy. Thanks, Mr. Coburn. You're mighty good to care."

"I've known what it was to live denuded, Peter. I'm prosperous, but I'm denuded, and it's—well, it takes it out of one! There's Justine, now; she's the joy of my life, its object, its reward. But a man needs more than a child for those middle years, and when the child grows up she—she goes her way, fills her life with things that aren't for you, loves someone else better than you, though she tries to hide it. It's perfectly all right; no one has a mortgage on another's life, nor a right so much as to want to claim it, but—it's a lonely thing! Don't hang too much on your adopted son, Peter Cassett, but take what is yours in justice, and which nothing that has happened forbids you, nor makes you unfit to seize."

Mr. Coburn spoke with such quiet intensity that Peter wondered at him; he could not imagine why Mr. Coburn spoke to him in this way.

"Imagine treating him that way!" thought Peter indignantly, and the indignation made his eyes warm, his handclasp tight as he took Mr. Coburn's hand.

"All I can say, sir, is thank you!" Peter said. "I don't agree with my part of it, but I surely think you're fine to me, and I'm sorry if you haven't had things to suit you. I suppose most lives run a little

askew, don't they? But you've succeeded in a way to make a man proud; it's great to make a success on the foundation of an honorable name."

"Right you are, Peter Cassett!" cried Mr. Coburn. "I don't seem to get a long range of vision; my horizon is pretty well shut off, but I get a lot out of my business reputation, everything, in fact—out of that, and Justine."

"Justine is a good deal like your business reputation, Mr. Coburn: founded on honor, running on it!" Peter laughed. "There's only one Justine Coburn! I'd do a good deal to uphold your name, Mr. Coburn!"

"You do a good deal to uphold it," Mr. Coburn corrected him. "On your keenness of judgment and conscientious care depends our output. I'm detaining you, Peter! You're a hustler! I think I detect symptoms of your grudging your employer your time!"

He left Peter with another handshake which did not seem called for, as the first one had been.

"Friendly! Almost as if he were fond of me, quite as though he wanted something!" thought Peter. "I'm going to tell Giles and Father Coigne about it this morning. My, but I'm thankful he can trust me!"

Father Coigne and Giles, when Peter told them the story of the Owen and Fitts' assault upon his integrity, were more perturbed than Peter had been.

"They're not through!" said Giles decidedly.

"No, Peter, the end is not yet!" Father Coigne agreed. "They would not have risked exposing their hand to you if they had not thrown a rear door wide open for escape. Your word against theirs—

well, I'd not be surprised if Justin Coburn would trust you as soon as his precious partners! But they don't reckon on their word, only. Be prepared for the worst, Peter the Great! But not down-heartedly! I'll lose my guess if you don't win out in the end. Perhaps this will be one of the sporting events of the season! Peter the Great running against John Wesley and the Roscoe roan!"

"With a handicap allowance for Peter the Great, who missed his leap in last year's finals!" added Peter.

"Handicap nothing!" cried Giles. "Peter the Great runs strong from start to finish!"

Days passed by into weeks without the fulfilment of Father Coigne and Giles' prophecy of further trouble for Peter. J. Wesley Owen treated Peter with a melancholy forbearance which suggested his virtuous grief over the young man's misunderstanding of him, and over his wrong-headedness. "He acts," Peter told Giles, "as if he were looking down upon me and saying how natural I look, and what a nice corpse I make."

Roscoe Fitts was another matter; he scarcely spoke to Peter, greeted him with a crisp nod, wordlessly, and frowned at him when they met.

Luther Selden's manner was insolent, triumphant, at the same time openly revealing his hatred for Peter, which he had hitherto kept decently in check.

"As to Luther Selden," Peter also told Giles, "I think he intends to feed me to his dog, 'Fluffy,' which I stole by the hand of Micky!"

There came a day when "Fluffy's" meal was ready. Peter, nicely articulated and labeled, ready to be fed to the dogs, was in his enemies' hands. Luther Sel-



den, as the one with least at stake, and best adapted to the task, was to lay before Mr. Coburn "the proofs of Peter's treachery, which Roscoe Fitts and Luther Selden had collected between them." It was decided that these two should be the prosecutors, Selden to open the case for the prosecution. Roscoe Fitts' role was to be a decent reluctance to believe the evidence, an unwillingness, as an employer, to credit the perfidy of an employee of the firm. This attitude of Roscoe Fitts' was to be accentuated in J. Wesley Owen, who was to hang back completely from action. As it happened, Mr. Owen's part required less histrionic ability than his partner's; Mr. Owen had developed something like sympathy for Peter—"lame and game," he said he was—who had never failed in kindness and duty, had been charming in Mr. Owen's house, especially in Leona Owen's eyes. J. Wesley developed a dangerous growth that might prove to be a conscience as the plot thickened and approached its execution.

Luther Selden knocked on the door of Mr. Coburn's private office. He opened it softly when bidden to do so, entered, and still more softly closed the door.

"Mr. Coburn, I should like a short period of your time. There is something that I am in duty bound to lay before you," said Selden, indicating a sheet of paper which he held in his hand. "May I ask, urge you, to prevent my being interrupted?"

"No one will come in without knocking, Luther, and then there is no reason why he should be admitted till you're through," said Mr. Coburn. "Anything wrong? Anything happened?"

"There is something, or I suppose I should say

someone, decidedly wrong, Mr. Coburn," replied Luther Selden. "Nothing has happened, no, but that is due only to my opportune discovery of this letter, and of something else which I looked for because of this letter. I wish that I might use the word 'providential'! Not my *opportune*, but my *providential* discovery of this letter, I would say, and have done with it!"

"By all means, Luther, use any word that makes you happy and let's have done with it!" said Mr. Coburn. "I could find it in my heart to wish that you had a more rapid-fire style, Luther! What have you to show me, or to tell me?"

"Mr. Coburn," said Luther Selden, reddening, and unreasonably laying this criticism to Peter's account in his long list of grievances against him, "I am no rapid-firer, like Peter Cassett, in whom you have reposed confidence, in spite of the well-grounded distrust of him felt by your partners and myself."

"See here, Luther Selden, stick to your text!" exclaimed Mr. Coburn, angrily. "It is not your business to read me lessons, nor to come to me to speak ill of anyone in this place, least of all, Peter Cassett. Or are you going to tell me that this letter has to do with him?"

"Decidedly!" Luther triumphed. "It is one that he dropped. You may read it. I could not tell you more than it does."

Mr. Coburn took the sheet which Luther offered him, with distaste manifest even to his finger-tips. He turned it over, and back again.

"The heading of this sheet has been torn off; where is it? Was it a firm name?" he demanded.

"Ah, there you are! You are quick to seize points,

Mr. Coburn!" Luther exclaimed. "Cassett had torn it off; it would have been easy to trace the letter, if he had let that stand. He had provided against the very chance that has occurred, his letter falling into other hands."

"Stop there, Selden! All you can say is that the heading was torn off when you found the letter; you can't say who tore it," said Mr. Coburn. "Where was it?"

"In the closet where Cassett hangs his hat and coat!" Selden triumphed over Mr. Coburn. "As to the tearing, there is no doubt——"

"I'll make my own deductions," Mr. Coburn said, and began to read. He frowned as he read, and took up the paper cutter which was his safety valve when he talked or thought.

"H'm!" he said, dropping the letter. He sat in silence, frowning heavily, and Selden waited his further opportunity. At last Mr. Coburn said:

"This letter is a personal one; it begins: 'Dear Mr. Cassett.' It tells Peter that 'they hold under consideration' his offer to pass over his inspection a certain number of our instruments daily which should be defective, in order that the writer might go to their buyers—whom Peter was to record for him—prove by these instruments that our goods were not what they pretended to be, and thus insinuate another make into their place.' It goes on to say that Peter could not be held liable for these scattered errors, and that, if the deal goes through, the writer is ready to take Peter over into his own employ at a high salary and a further commission, so the end would be gain to him. It is signed only by initials, as if there had been former correspondence, which

the letter all the way through implies. What was the postmark? Where is the envelope?"

"There was none. Apparently it had slipped out of Cassett's pocket; it lay folded, as you see it, on the floor," said Luther Selden glibly.

"H'm! I don't seem to be impressed, Luther Selden. Anyone but you know of this?" said Mr. Coburn.

"Both your partners, Mr. Owen and Mr. Fitts. They are sore about it, but they are not like you; they are deeply impressed, in fact convinced of Cassett's game," said Selden. "That is not all, Mr. Coburn. I felt that it was up to me to do all that I could to investigate this affair before I laid it before you. You know I dislike Peter Cassett, that I always have. I insist that a dog stealer is low down in the scale, and I am morally certain that he instigated the theft of my dog. But though you may not credit me with humane motives, I felt that it was unfair to condemn even this person without due evidence. Peter Cassett trades on his misfortune, but still I pity——"

"Stop that sort of drivel, Luther Selden!" Mr. Coburn interrupted him. "Cassett does not trade on anything but his manhood, and he asks no odds of the world because of his loss! What's that nickname I heard that fun-loving, brave lad had for you? Diet of Worms! Stop squirming around, worm-fashion, if you want me to hear another word from you! I tell you I'm not impressed!"

"You are quite free to believe me, or Cassett, as you prefer, Mr. Coburn," said Selden with dignity. "All the world knows that faithful, honest service goes for nothing against a slick tongue and manner; you like Cassett! After I had found and read that

letter I went to the wareroom after Cassett had left; I stayed late, in order to do you this service, Mr. Coburn. I found this! And this! And this!" With immense dramatic effect, not spoiling it by an additional word, Luther Selden laid before Mr. Coburn three of the small, delicately constructed and adjusted instruments which were his pride to put upon the market perfect in every detail and material.

One after the other Mr. Coburn took up, examined, and laid down the three. Then he put a magnifying reading glass in his eye, switched on the electricity, and examined them over again, slowly, thoroughly. Then he laid them down, removed the glass, turned off the light, and looked at Selden. It was easy to see that the effect which the letter had failed to produce had been wrought by the actual handling of defective instruments, the perfection of which meant so much to their maker.

"Well!" said Mr. Coburn at last. "Where were these?"

"They were among that day's lot; they were among the others, all of which Cassett had passed as perfect. They were ready for shipment," Luther Selden replied.

"Can you swear that none that was defective was passed in the factory? Can you prove that the damage was done after they had come into the ware-room? Of course these imperfect parts could be put in afterward; the first, perfect ones, removed, but it is a delicate job; it would be more likely that the imperfection got there in the first assembling. Can you swear it didn't?" demanded Mr. Coburn.

"Mr. Coburn," said Selden, with an air of patient endurance, sorely strained, "you know that I am

unable to prove, as you say, that the damage was done after these things got into the wareroom. No one could, in the nature of things, prove that. It stands to reason that there would be no witness of the operation. But as to swearing, yes! I can swear that none of these ever passed out of the factory in this state. It is only my word, my oath, and you seem intent upon casting doubt upon me, Mr. Coburn! I had thought that you liked and trusted me; I know that I have served you well. You are free to fancy whom you please, to like anyone you will better than me, but I demand justice. I have brought you proofs that would convince any man who was not wilfully blind. You have never had occasion to suspect me; if you suspect me, it is unjustified. It is because I never liked Cassett; does not this prove me right to dislike him? Young men know each other as an employer cannot, as no girl can know a fellow, Mr. Coburn!"

"There is no girl in my employ; if there were, she would not enter into this case," Mr. Coburn warned Luther Selden angrily. "I do not like your methods, Selden. You reveal a venomous animosity of which the man you attack is incapable. But I admit that you have brought me disturbing evidence of treachery. I do not like it; so much I will say. But be careful of yourself before this goes farther, Luther! If I find anything wrong in this story, woe be unto you! I can't believe it of him; it isn't possible! Did you say my partners know this?"

"Yes; they know," said Selden, enjoying Mr. Coburn's manifest distress. To himself he triumphantly added: "If you get anything on me, let me know it! There's not a chance; we've got it framed

up right!"

"Send them to me. You've no more to say?" asked Mr. Coburn.

"No more. I have said it all, enough," said Selden, going.

Roscoe Fitts came alone to the senior partner's office a short time after Luther Selden had left it.

"J. Wesley went home," Fitts announced as he entered. "Bad about Cassett, but there isn't the least doubt. Luther said you wanted to talk to me about it. There's not much to say; least said soonest mended. He's a cripple, or I'd try to settle him; he ought to be labelled. But a cripple! I'd dismiss him with a flea in his ear, and let it go at that."

"You seem convinced," suggested Mr. Coburn.

"Oh, Lord, man, convinced! It's not a question of conviction; it's a question of facts. He's a fool, but he's a crooked fool, to deal with us like that! He'll be crippled worse if he tries to walk like a corkscrew, when the straight way is made easy for him! You've been kind to him, Mr. Coburn! Be kind now, and send him off on the Q. T.; don't make a fuss," advised Roscoe Fitts in a flood of words.

"I'll never refuse any man a chance to vindicate himself," said Mr. Coburn.

"I'll send for Peter and suspend him from my employ, but I'll tell him that I'm ready to admit his proofs of innocence! God knows, I want them!"

He rang the bell and told the office boy to summon Peter. In a few words, with eyes downcast, not willing to meet Peter's, Mr. Coburn told him the story, laid before him the letter and the defective instruments.

He raised his eyes at last and met Peter's clear, yet

outraged gaze.

"I know it's all right, Peter!" he added, in spite of himself. "I do know it. Hasten to prove it. You are only suspended. Have you an answer ready?"

Peter turned on Roscoe Fitts a burning glance before which the man quailed.

"A frame-up, Mr. Coburn," Peter said. "I fully understand, but I don't know that you will. I can hold my tongue, hey, Roscoe Fitts?"

"And you people can buy absolution," added Fitts.

"By heck, it would come high for you, I'd think!" said Peter, and turned away.

By an impulse Mr. Coburn, who was not given to acting on impulse, sprang to his feet.

"Don't think I believe it, Peter! Don't mind my doing as I do. You couldn't clear yourself if I didn't put it up to you! Don't imagine I believe it, Peter!"

"That's all right, Mr. Coburn! Of course no white man would believe it. But I do not imagine I can clear myself. My word will answer with you," said Peter, and heartily shook the hand that Mr. Coburn held out to him. Then he swung away.



## CHAPTER XX.

*"O Limed Soul, That, Struggling to Be Free, Art  
More Engaged."*

**I**T was a pleasant picture that met Peter's sight when he returned home that night, but he saw it with new eyes. He had given hostages to fortune when he made himself responsible for the life of little Giles. It came upon him with a pang, as he entered his living room, that misfortune no longer fell upon him alone.

The baby sat in Peter's own armchair, absurdly small in its depths, yet valiantly stretched out to lay a hand on each arm, as he saw Peter sit.

Dominico mounted guard, with knitted driving lines, Justine's work for the baby, hanging across his shoulders, and Canis Major jumped up from his honorable position at the baby's feet, to welcome his master with his old-time joy.

Little Giles was a radiant baby. His hair—all that he so far possessed—concentrated into a curly roll that extended midway from his brow to the back of his head; it was less a color of hair than a shine of hair, reddish gold like burnished metal. His eyes were changed into a golden hazel; his cheeks were rosy; his skin remarkably white; his red lips always parted, half-laughing, showing the whiteness of recently acquired small teeth. Altogether he gave the effect of radiance, as if he were a little golden planet dropped harmlessly upon this other planet, to shine and give joy. Now, when he espied Peter, the baby

screamed shrilly and hammered upon the arms of the chair with his soft palms, not a whit minding the wood's hardness.

Peter caught him up with one arm and took his place in the armchair. He minded his disability perhaps most of all when it prevented him from tossing the child ceiling-high, in a rough and tumble frolic, such as he would once have given him. But the baby did not miss what he had never had, and chuckled and squealed rapturously when Peter, holding him by his fat arms, let him down almost to the floor and raised him again as high as his arms could reach, lowering him to pretend to bite the baby's folds of flesh, which represented a neck.

"Ah, small person," muttered Peter, "I'll never go back, however it turns out, and how shall I give you your dues if I don't, I wonder!"

"Mr. Peter," began Dominico portentously, "this is a day!"

"Well, I noticed that myself, Dominico," returned Peter. "I think, without exaggeration, we may call this a day!"

"Did she call up to tell you? She said she might," said Dominico.

"She? Who? No, she didn't, anyway! What was it?" asked Peter.

"Mrs. Riordan," Dominico answered. "The baby stood alone, no one touching him, and he tried a step or two. I caught him; he did not fall. But this is a day, the day on which a man child begins to walk from his smallness into his greatness as a man."

"It surely is!" cried Peter. "Let's treat on it, Dominico! I've got to begin to practice strict economy, to provide for Giles' education, but let's make a *festa*!"

Will you go out and get whatever you think would be good?" He offered Dominico a handful of loose silver.

"Mrs. Riordan has already made it a *festa*," said Dominico. "There's no need of you to spend. She has prepared ice cream; she said it was best because the baby could lick a spoonful of it, and there were not many things he could have on his own *festa*."

"Seems to me he is young to stand and try to walk," suggested Peter.

"He is very young," agreed Dominico proudly. "I have burned candles before San Antonio that your baby might be strong, great to run and jump, and he is beginning!"

"You fine Dominico!" cried Peter, appreciating what Dominico did not say. "Better light candles that I may be able to do for him what he should have done for him. I'm going to tell you all about why I called this 'a day,' as you did; it wasn't such a pleasant reason! But I'm not going to tell you yet; I'm going to see what happens. I'll be at home to-morrow, Dominico; I'm not going to the office. In fact, I doubt strongly that I'll ever return to Coburn, Owen and Fitts!"

"You have not the sack!" cried horror-stricken Dominico. "No one could give you a sack!"

Peter laughed. "Not exactly a sack, Dominico; it might be called a sweater!" he said. "Something has happened; I may not return. Will you call Mr. Guernsey and ask him if he can fix it up so that I'll see him and Father Coigne together to-night?"

"Mr. Giles says that Father wants to see you anyway for his ball game. You are to be an empire, if he can get you; they'll be there," announced Do-

minico, returning from telephoning.

"Well, if Father turned me into Peter the Great, he may as well make me an empire; thanks, Dominico," Peter said.

Father Coigne arrived with Giles rather late; the priest had had a meeting of his feminine committee for the fair at Christmas, which had proved difficult to manage. Three of its most pious members were profoundly impressed by their length and magnitude of parochial service, and their attachment to Father Coigne was so strong that they watched like cats at a mouse-hole, all three of them, for either of the others to come out ahead in his confidence. He had forgotten to mention that he expected one of these ladies to carry on her usual charge in the fair, and she plainly showed that she resented it.

"Well, it isn't as if you had been in this parish, working hard as long as *I* have! I've had the refreshments ever since poor Father Whittle's day, and if anybody else will take it off my hands I'll never think of objecting!" observed another.

"I'd be glad enough to get out of having my table," said the first speaker. "I've carried it long and faithful, if you *have* lived here longer than me! It's not that I want him to give me work, dear knows, but him to pass me over, when he knows what I've done for him, what I'd do for him——"

Father Coigne entered at that moment.

"Good evening, ladies!" he called out cheerily. "All the stand-bys here, I see! What should I do without you? I've been taking it for granted that the old order would prevail, each keep on with her old share of the fair, but it's a comfort to have visible proof of it!"

He seated himself with an impartial smile to each of them, whose devotion to himself taxed his remarkable skill in managing people. The meeting went on peacefully, but it was due to Father Coigne that it did, and it made him late in going with Giles Guernsey to see Peter.

"Shame to keep you waiting, Hermit!" said Giles. "What's wrong? Something!"

"It's my fault that we're late, Peter," added Father Coigne. "I had a meeting. Before we go into your petty affairs, let's settle my important one! I want you to umpire when our boys play the Hasketburg club. How about it?"

"Of course, if the other chaps will stand for me," agreed Peter.

"No trouble about that; you have a reputation for fair play and honesty, Peter the Great!" returned the priest.

"Have I though! That seems to bear on what I have to tell you!" cried Peter.

"Ah, ha! Giles and I were certain that there'd been further developments in your lost opportunity to make your fortune!" exclaimed the priest. "What's up now?"

"It's not up; it's down, and it's I that is down," said Peter. "Listen, Father, and Giles!" And Peter told his story almost without interruption from his hearers.

"Well, I'll be——" Giles began, but checked himself.

"No, Giles, I'd hardly think that you would be!" remarked Father Coigne. "But it is certain that Roscoe Fitts, most especially, and Selden with him, are taking great chances of being! Apparently your

round little partner, the one with the Welsh name, John Wesley Owen, is not so bad."

"No, Father; he has developed a conscience," Peter assented. "It's a crooked one; I'd not care greatly for one of that brand, but it's one of a sort. I'm not sure that he had not convinced himself of what he told me, that it would actually be doing Mr. Coburn a kindness to put that trick over on him, and I know he does not stand in with the downright dishonesty of Fitts and Selden. I think his conscience is growing uneasy as he sees exactly what he's let himself in for. He's messy, but he is not destitute of a degree of principle."

"Any religion is better than none at all. I suppose Owen has been taught basic principles of honesty," said Giles. "Did you know, Hermit, that Fitts is going to marry the only child of a man who made enough money distilling not to care that they fixed up the Eighteenth Amendment later on?"

"No; I hadn't heard," said Peter.

"It's a fact. He's begun to build out our way, Woodcock Links, and he did *not* employ me on his plans," Giles said. "He has an architect from New York with a reputation, also with a price! So I deduce that papa is giving the girl a house. She's plastered from heel to head with yellow-backed notes, and she's exceedingly tall! Thus you may see, Hermit, that so far the way of this transgressor has not been hard!

"And Roscoe Fitts intends to marry! An heiress, hey?" observed Father Coigne considering. "Well, well! That's interesting. I'd take it that the girl draped in gold certificates was worth at least as much to him as his partnership with Mr. Coburn?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, Father! With her at his back he can get all the partnerships he wants," Giles assured him.

"Exactly so! Exactly so!" murmured the priest. "Now, Peter, my son, see here! Don't settle it in your mind that it all ends here, to-night. I think that it does not; in fact I am certain that it does not! Mr. Coburn has shown great liking for you, real confidence and affection. He has assured you that he does not believe Selden's tale and that's much to his credit, for they've laid before him what look like proofs. I want you to be ready to meet him without a shadow against him in your memory when he finds out that the whole thing is an abominable lie—for he will find it out; I assure you of that! Keep before your eyes only that Mr. Coburn stuck to you; he had to take some action on the matter, but he has begged you to feel certain that he trusts you. When it is all cleared up, don't allow this to come between you and Mr. Coburn; that wouldn't be fair. And it will be cleared up, Peter the Great, shortly; you'll see!"

"Father Coigne, Giles, don't you repeat one word of what I've told you!" cried Peter alarmed. "I will never tell Mr. Coburn what his partners wanted me to do; I'm determined to hold my tongue and take what comes. I beg of you to remember that I unloaded to you in strict confidence. Don't ever use it, even to benefit me."

"Never would have occurred to me to do so, Peter," said the priest, "nor to Giles, I know. I'm not at all sure that it is right to leave Mr. Coburn in ignorance of the story, but it is your story to tell or withhold. I confess I like to see you take this stand, though it's not too sensible! It's fine to hold your

tongue, now. However, it will all come out, soon, and we shall not tattle."

"I never will talk, Hermit," said Giles. "I don't just see why Father Coigne is so confident, but if he's got a hunch from some superior source that it will straighten out, I'm sure thankful! Why don't you come out to the house to stay till it's over? Bring that namesake of mine to bunk in with that namesake of yours, and have a great old vacation! Isabelle would hit the ceiling if I went home and said you were coming. I told her about Fitts and Owen bracing you to turn rascal, and she's burning candles enough to break me, that you may come out on top."

"Of course you told Isabelle about it!" laughed Peter. "Ah, well! If I don't come out on top I'll try to curl up comfortably underneath! I wouldn't care so much, Father, if I hadn't taken the boy. But when I look at him I don't want to be curtailed; I want to do the best there is for the little chap."

"Yes. When you look at that baby, Peter, you may well feel that this comes hard on you; I do myself," said the priest, with an expression in his eyes which Peter could not construe. "However, it will be all right for your boy, Peter, and my boy Peter!"

As early in the morning as she dared to present herself at Peter's door, Justine Coburn was admitted by Dominico.

"Mr. Cassett is not going out? Ask him please to see me!" she begged.

"Why, Miss Coburn, ever since I have been with Mr. Peter he has been glad to see you!" Dominico reproached Justine for the doubt her voice expressed. Secretly Dominico cherished hopes for Peter's ultimate happiness, founded upon Miss Coburn.



Justine was received in the living room only by the second Giles; he received her with the utmost cordiality, for he liked her better than almost anyone else that he knew; she wore clothing that positively sprouted from its depths things that a person of his age hailed enthusiastically. Now he had tired of playing with familiar toys on a blanket outspread for him, and joyously gave Justine the "sailor kiss" which she demanded when she snatched him to her breast. He was an observing person, and he wiped moisture from her cheeks which was not ordinarily there, and which he did not approve, it being salty to kiss.

Peter lost but a few moments in coming to greet Justine. She looked at him hastily and wondered to see him much as usual; he did not look troubled.

"Garr!" remarked the baby, putting out one hand to pat Peter.

"Hear that? We believe that he is addressing me; we like to believe that he means Guard, which he's getting taught to call me," said Peter, rubbing the soft hand against his cheek.

"Guard? Oh, Guardian? Are you going to have him call you that, Peter?" asked Justine.

"Well, what else? It's cost me quite a lot of thought," said Peter. "'Uncle' savors of the funny column, and I don't want him to think I'm a Medici! Besides I hate 'uncle'! So what can he be taught? I wanted straight Peter, but they all say it would be too familiar; I suppose they're afraid of breeding contempt for me in him. I sort of like Guard; the Old Guard that never surrenders, you know!"

"Indeed I know!" murmured Justine hiding her lips, which trembled, in the baby's slender supply of brilliant hair. "I like Guard for you, Peter; it suits

you. He's getting prettier all the time; his teeth are so dear!"

"They do improve him," agreed Peter. "It's sharper than a serpent's thanks to have a toothless child, you know."

"Peter!" Justine did not laugh. "How can you fool with me, or is it to push me off? Don't think of me in connection with your trouble! Yet don't blame father either. He is heart-sick over it, and he does know that there is an explanation!"

"So he told you what happened, Justine?" exclaimed Peter, wishing that she had not known. How could he discuss the matter with Justine Coburn?

"He was so miserable over it that he gave me a clue, and then, of course, I got the whole story out of him," Justine said. "Peter, there is something that you could tell; won't you speak? Peter, I beg of you to tell your side of this affair."

"Now, Justine, my dear old Dusting, please let us stick to the kid's teeth!" Peter implored her. "I won't even admit that I have a side in the affair. But I'll freely admit that if there were one, I'd never turn it around to the world. Oh, yes; I know you are not the world; you are Justine, the best, truest friend a fellow like me ever could have, or dream of having! But I think the only thing to do is to keep my hands, and more especially my tongue, to myself. Want to take Master Giles out in your car? That's your favorite dissipation."

"Have you told Giles? Father Coigne? Can't they do anything?" asked Justine.

"Justine, you're foxy! Wasn't that a neat way to catch me off guard, and make me admit there was something to tell?" Peter laughed at her, enjoying

her confusion. "Now, Dusting dear, stick to that innocent as a subject that's safe!"

Justine looked steadily at Peter as if she were seeing him anew, trying to adjust him to her experience. "Peter, call Dominico to take Giles."

Peter did so, and when the baby had been borne away, he came back, shutting the door behind him. "I suppose I ought to have had that nurse girl, but Dominico begged so hard to be allowed to look after Spiffens, he's so fond of him, that I hadn't the heart to sever them. Lucky, probably; I couldn't afford—" Peter caught himself up sharply, but Justine was intent on her own thoughts.

"Peter, I thought I wouldn't tell you, but when I see you I know, I feel all over again, what a force you have which I lack, and I want to tell you. When you were hurt—you told me about your fight with yourself, and I've thanked you over and over again for telling me that, Peter!—you won out, and went right on blessing God! And I've watched you adjust, stand the daily wear and tear of what is so hard, so cruelly hard to a man like you, and, though this is a greater test than the acceptance of deprivation not yet faced, you've passed the test gloriously! I've never caught you whimpering, not even to yourself, nor ever asking the least odds from other happy people. And now you are lied about, injured, and I'm sure you are worried about the baby's future, yet I find you serene, talking nonsense as you always do—Peter, why can't I win at least peace?" Justine twisted her fingers, as she talked, and raised a piteous face to Peter.

"You can, my poor dear Justine!" said Peter gently. "What are you putting in the way? Don't

worry over me; I'm not worrying—much. I'm a bit anxious for Spiffens' future, not a great deal, even for him."

"Spiffens!" Justine echoed the absurd nickname tenderly. "That's like you, Peter! I can't win peace! What do I put in the way? Well, what? Not ambition; not vanity; not any kind of wrongdoing that I know. My father does not oppose me. He knows I have seen Father Coigne, and read what he gave me, that I trust your faith and envy you; he does not oppose me; he understands me and pities me. My mother loathes the Catholic Church, but then—Well, my mother does not count; that's the horrid truth, Peter! She had her chance, and would not take it. My father is a great man. Peter, try to hear me with your soul's hearing! I made up my mind a month ago that I would do as you advised, get on my knees—no; it was Father Coigne said that! Well, I was going to be baptized, go to confession and trust to being cured by the sacraments, which I know, I see, do so much for you—and for the priest, and Isabelle, Giles, all of you. After I reached this decision I did have something like peace. I went daily to St. John's and it seemed saturated with peace. I did not speak to Father Coigne, but I was resolved. Then one day, two weeks ago, it was in church, too, everything I had ever doubted became certain negation. I was torn asunder; I was cast out; the Sacramental Presence—Oh, Peter, it was the outer darkness, indeed, and there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! I told myself that at least I had been saved from lying! And now I am at sea, lost, worse than ever, and I shall never, never come! Why was it like that? Why, if it were true, might I not

have been upheld to go on?"

"Well, Justine dear," said Peter gently, with almost a priest's manner of treating as trifling the wanderings of mere intellect, "I don't know, but I'd guess that you hadn't taken holy water when you entered the church."

"Peter, how can you ridicule me!" cried Justine violently.

"No, no, Justine; I'm not! I'm not making fun!" Peter exclaimed. "Of course I'm not! But I think that it was the devil, if you ask me, and that even in church he assails us, just as he hung around when Our Lord could be seen on earth. Holy water is intended to drive him off; that's why I said that, Justine! Instead of going out, you should have gone forward, right up to the rail, and made an act of faith, called on Our Lord, don't you see, to drive the devil off? Instead of that you mistook him for your own cleverness, your intellect that could not believe, and that's what he is fondest of putting over. You go back to the church, Justine, and make up your mind all over again to get on your knees—that's a dandy compendium of advice! And if you don't win peace I lose my guess! Then if the devil tries again to sweep away that faith of yours, which is about like Spiffens trying to walk, make faces at him, tell him you can't be fooled by him again, and call *hard* on Our Lord; you see He's there just as He was when the devil used to get frisky in Judaea! If I know the devil—and I'm sorry to say I do!—he won't come around when he knows you're on to him. I had no notion you were so near, Justine dear! And you've no notion how glad, thankful I am!"

"Near!" exclaimed Justine. "Near! You've

meant every word that you've said, that I'm assailed by the devil, and must personally assault him! Peter, are you a young man, talking to a twentieth century girl, really? It's medieval!"

"It's twentieth century quite as much, and to my mind rather more than the ages of faith," maintained Peter stoutly. "The devil it is, and he must be recognized and fought. But he'd never fight for you so hard, Justine, if you weren't almost out of his grasp! Pull the door to behind you, Justine, and shut him out! Surely you're near!"

"Oh, Peter, I'm far and afar!" cried Justine sadly. "It's worse than ever. I came to let you know how hard hit I was by your new, wicked trouble, and I've unloaded my own upon you! Why is it, Peter Cassett, that young as you are, I always confess to you; never you to me?"

"Isn't it because you want so much, and I want nothing, Justine?" suggested Peter. He looked at her steadily, letting her see the depths of sorrow, yet the depths of peace in his denied heart.

Justine turned away, her tears falling.

"You have said a profoundly wise thing, Peter. You have wings, but I am caught and struggling," she said, and left him with hanging head.

## CHAPTER XXI

*"Mark Now, How a Plain Tale Shall Put You Down."*

FATHER COIGNE put down his breviary and blessed himself. Then he looked at his watch.

"Getting to be eight o'clock," he said to himself. "I'm up to None; no trouble at all getting that and Vespers and Compline read after I come back, and I'll still have time to finish that article I began to read last week. You're a busy man, Father Gregory! I may miss Roscoe Fitts if I delay longer, and I think I'll convert him, at least to reparation."

The priest arose, took off his cassock, examined the bottom of its right sleeve, and made a mental note to ask his cousin Rose to repair its frayed edge. He hung it on the clothes tree in the corner of his room, and took from the closet his best-black coat.

"I've got to appear my best; he's not the man to look beyond a lost button!" thought the priest with his whimsical smile. "By the way, what rabat have I on? My old one! That was a narrow escape; I nearly forgot about it, and it's greener than it is black. It's the beautiful jet black silk one that Sister Nicola made me, that I must appear in before the fine gentleman!"

At last with his new rabat showing between the lapels of his fine coat, and his Roman collar spotless and glossy from Cousin Rose's skillful ironing—Father Coigne told her that if he had not known that her mother was his aunt, he'd have sworn she was

Chinese, such laundry work she could do!—and his soft felt hat guiltless of dust, Father Coigne went forth, like St. George, to try his hand at his particular dragon.

Roscoe Fitts lived in bachelor apartments, in a model building, quite equal, Woodcock boasted, to any house of its kind in New York. He had a living room that was twenty-five feet square, not reckoning its extraneous bow window, with the immense central pane of glass, studio fashion. He had a luxurious bedroom fourteen feet square, and a bathroom finished in marble worthy of an emperor. There was a restaurant on the ground floor of the house, a cafeteria and dancing room on the glass-enclosed roof. Fitts said that he economized by living in "The Hermitage," as it was called, but it was obvious on the face of it why he had wanted to put through a plan to get rich quick. He was to marry an heiress, but he had been shown that she, and more especially her father, had an accurate sense of values; he knew that his past debts would be no part of her setting-up expenses when she married.

Father Coigne was at once recognized by the porter when he presented himself at the entrance to the apartments, which were approached through another way than the central swinging doors into the restaurant.

"Ah, Father!" said the man, saluting military fashion, 'hand to the visor of his cap, "I've never seen you here before. Mr. Fitts? Yes, Father. He's on the third floor, up two flights. Take the elevator, Father."

The porter conducted the priest to the elevator, doing him honor, and gave him over to the elevator



man. It was thus accidentally due to Father Coigne's finding a friend at court that he went straight up to Roscoe Fitts' apartment, unannounced, and this probably worked well for his mission.

Roscoe Fitts was expecting his tailor's messenger, bringing his latest order; he had taken off the latch of his door in order not to be troubled to open it when the man arrived. He was comfortably disposed in his favorite chair, a loose robe around him, and beside him a table on which were magazines, a box of cigars, a tray with a siphon and a glass on it, as well as a fine Venetian flagon, unmistakably containing survival from destruction, when Father Coigne lifted and dropped the small antique knocker.

"Come in!" called Roscoe Fitts, and the priest obeyed.

Fitts's head came up and his feet dropped down when he looked up and saw, instead of the young Hebrew whom he had expected with his box, the small, trim figure of the priest in his respectable black coat, carrying his soft hat in his hand.

"Father Coigne?" Roscoe Fitts gasped.

"Precisely, Mr. Fitts. Father Coigne, come to have a brief talk with you, if you please," returned the priest unsmiling, going over and taking, unbidden, a straight chair opposite to Mr. Fitts' deep one.

Roscoe Fitts was rarely taken at a disadvantage; he was not a person long to remain at one when it happened.

He arose, smiling with an effect of cordiality.

"I protest! Not that chair!" he cried. "I was expecting a man; you surprised me, but I am delighted to see you."

He held out his hand, and pushed forward another

er easy chair, but Father Coigne made no move, and he disregarded the proffered hand.

"I am quite comfortable where I am, Mr. Fitts. I hope not to detain you long," he said.

"Apparently you do not come here in a friendly spirit," said Roscoe Fitts, falling back slightly and frowning.

"I have come here solely for friendship's sake—or, no! Partly for the sake of justice," returned Father Coigne. "Resume your seat, Mr. Fitts."

Roscoe Fitts was not accustomed to be bidden to this or that, but he obeyed, dropped back into his chair, drew his robe around him, and looked at the priest.

"Allow me to pour you a glass of brandy and vichy; I have some French cognac still. Then a cigar?" added Fitts, as the priest made a slight motion of dissent with one hand. Fitts leaned forward and held out the box of fine cigars, freshly opened, to Father Coigne for his acceptance. "Nor a cigar? Have you no small vices?"

"I smoke," said Father Coigne. "But not now, thank you; this is not a social call."

"I'll wager you have come to beg mercy for your cripple protégé, Peter Cassett!" cried Roscoe Fitts, settling back again. He shook his head, and lighted a cigar at a spirit lamp. "Bad case. Sorry, sir, but it is a bad case!"

"Better not wager heavily that I have come to ask mercy for Mr. Cassett, who is in no sense any man's protégé. You will lose your wager. I agree that it is a bad case," said Father Coigne dryly.

"What's your game?" demanded Fitts sharply, accepting the priest's open challenge.

"No game whatever, Mr. Fitts, but a fortunate knowledge of facts which you foolishly discount. Have you not lived long enough to know that there is no ostrich that hides himself so unsuccessfully as the wrong-doer? Mr. Fitts, you know precisely what you have done against Peter Cassett. You know that he is not only guiltless of what you have rigged up against him, but that you have done it because you found his honor incorruptible. You and your partner—though the man Owen is not the principal in the affair—tested Cassett and know him. It is because you know him that you will push him out, disgraced, if you can work it. I appeal to your own honor, if you possess any, to right what you have done. Contrive to explain the apparent evidence to Mr. Coburn; use some of the cleverness that framed it to do this, and Mr. Cassett—or perhaps it is I?—will keep silence."

Roscoe Fitts listened to this speech from Father Coigne, his cigar held in his hand, burning crookedly on one side, the other going out. Fitts was a keen-witted man and a dull one could hardly have missed Father Coigne's implication that if he did not right his wrong to Peter without coercion, the means to coerce him were not lacking. He thought swiftly, and decided on his course; certainly he would not do the absurd thing the priest asked of him. "Confound these men anyway!" Fitts thought. "They imagine they can rule everyone as they do their superstitious people!"

"You imply that if I do not carry out your demand, your utterly silly demand, which is to frame up an alibi, or an explanation for the cripple, you decidedly will not keep silence," Fitts said savagely.

"By all means talk; that is your trade. Permit me to remind you that you have nothing to say on our affairs, have no knowledge of our business, except what that fellow tattles to you in confession, probably lies, and that I do not in the least fear you. Permit me, also, to call your attention to the fact that it is not customary for a man to intrude upon another man in his own apartment, to bully him with hints of a power he could not possess, especially when the man intruded upon notoriously hates your dangerous, Roman, un-American gang that calls itself a Church—a political foreign invasion! I could not save Cassett if I would, Mr. Coigne; he is guilty!"

"Then you refuse to accept the way out I offer you? You will not repair your wrong?" asked Father Coigne quietly.

"There is no wrong except Cassett's wrong to his employers. I will not intercede for him. This interview is over," said Fitts, leaning forward to re-light his cigar.

"No; you are mistaken; only its introduction," said Father Coigne. Something in his voice made Fitts pause, with his right arm extended toward the light, and look at the priest.

Father Coigne leaned forward slightly; he spoke slowly, clearly, saying:

"Yet there is a reason why Peter Cassett deserves to be considered especially, now. He has undertaken expense, the support of a child. He has adopted poor little Kitty Collins' baby."

"Kitty's—baby!" gasped Roscoe Fitts. "Cassett? It lived?"

"It lives, a beautiful child. Peter does not know who its father is. Out of pity for the unhappy young

mother, and the guiltless little child, Peter has taken it; he is supporting it, giving it all that its father should have given it," said the priest.

"Well," Roscoe Fitts rallied himself. He lighted his cigar, but his hands trembled. "That's good of Cassett; I admit that's decent of him to take over a friendless child. You imply it was a sad case. Who is Kitty Collins?"

"See here, Roscoe Fitts, there is no sort of use in this," said Father Coigne sternly. "You answered your question, before you asked it, when you heard her name. Now will you right Peter Cassett?"

"Adopt the child myself?" suggested Fitts with a sorry attempt at a laugh. "'Fraid not; I'm not a man that is inclined to that sort of philanthropy."

"To which sort? To mercy to a helpless girl? To honesty? To justice?" demanded the priest. "Fitts, I know who the father of Kitty's baby is. She told me his name. It was under the seal of secrecy, though not in confession, but she will obey me when I bid her reveal it to put Peter Cassett back in his proper place in the eyes of the world, Peter Cassett, who is befriending the child whom she parted from with bitter tears. She was not a heartless mother; she would have done her feeble best to protect it. Do you think for a moment that she would refuse to cry aloud the name of the man who has been cruel, selfish, wicked to her and to her baby, when shielding him harmed her baby's savior? Rest assured that the secret will remain a secret only as long as it takes me to see Kitty Collins, and get her before a Justice to swear to the name of the man who has wrecked her life almost before she has begun to live it."

Roscoe Fitts smoked furiously for a few moments

without speaking; Father Coigne waited.

"See here, Mr. Gregory Coigne, you are lying to me, but I'm up to your tricks," he said. "First of all, what do I care for your scandal, or what you do? It is nothing to me, this girl, this man's name, the brat, nor Cassett. But your story is a fool thing to try to put over. If you knew that man's name you would force him to marry the girl, and give her and her child support. Do you suppose I don't know how you Roman priests insist on that sort of marriage? Or is he already married?"

"Nevertheless, I know the name, and all the city shall know it shortly," said Father Coigne. "I suppose you would hardly get so far as to conceive that I would not want him to marry the girl, because he is such an out and out scoundrel that she would lose her soul if she fell into his hands? As it is, she is doing all in her power to atone for what was almost wholly his sin. I would not put any girl into his legal control; I know where she would end. So your answer, Roscoe Fitts, is that the fine gentleman is far and away too low to marry the humble girl. Where do you think that girl would be now, but that she is a Catholic, who turned to her Church and her priest when all around her was black night? What do you suppose would have happened to that beautiful boy if Peter Cassett's Catholic charity had not enfolded him in its warmth? The man whose name I know may well ask himself these questions in the hours of the night when decent men are asleep! And if he does not answer them aright, and act upon those answers, he will be answered when he dies, and stands before the God whose justice will be meted out to him. As you well know, that man is not mar-

ried. But he intends to marry a wealthy young woman shortly. Do you think he will succeed in marrying her if Kitty Collins goes to that young woman and her father, and tells them her story? As she will; I can promise you faithfully that she will! Don't you think, now that you see the case farther, now that you know that Peter Cassett deserves consideration for his charity, that you will find a way to explain the accusation against him to Mr. Coburn, and leave Peter in the full possession of his stainless name?"

"Does Cassett know who the father is?" asked Roscoe Fitts moistening his lips.

"No. I told you, didn't I, that I alone know him, and that I am pledged most solemnly not to expose him—now! I will go to Kitty Collins and she will consent to my publishing his name. She will herself go to the young woman this man intends to marry. You see I speak positively, but I know my ground. Kitty will do anything that I tell her is part of her atonement. She would walk over red hot plowshares, bare-footed, if it was to serve Peter Cassett to half the degree this disclosure will serve him. The man is a partner in a prosperous concern; he will be so no longer. His senior partner, and even his other partner, would reject him with loathing if they heard this tale. He will be what he should be, an object of contempt, denuded, labelled. I can and will carry out my threat to the letter."

"Oh, you can, fast enough! You priests have your people bridled and blindfolded! Your girl will not refuse to brand herself at your word," said Fitts.

"Rather fortunate that we have an influence, isn't it? When you consider what is in the world to de-

your the helpless and murder the innocent of soul?" suggested Father Coigne. "But the poor child's friends all know that her baby was born, and that Peter Cassett has taken him. She is paying the price now. It is the man I am after—and have got hard and fast in my power, thank God! Are you ready to give me your decision?"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Roscoe Fitts, mopping his forehead with the fine handkerchief which his betrothed had delicately embroidered with his initials.

"As to the manner of your reinstating Peter Cassett, I'll have to leave that to you," said Father Coigne, rising. The question had yielded him his victory. "You proved yourself ingenious in constructing the evidence against Mr. Cassett. I think I can safely leave it to you to explain it away again. At any rate, I am unequal to the task. All that I insist upon is that Mr. Coburn is made to understand clearly that Mr. Cassett is all that he believed him to be. I think that it is certain that you will be obliged to withdraw from the firm, but you can supply yourself with a career. I hear that you intend to marry an heiress. Her father is amply able to launch a son-in-law," he said.

"What guarantee have I that you will keep faith with me if I do as you ask?" inquired Roscoe Fitts.

"Have you no conception of the honor that keeps its word?" suggested the priest.

"Not when it is in the mouth of a Roman priest," retorted Fitts.

"Now for that entirely unnecessary insult I'll answer you, and not spare you the truth!" said Father Coigne, but without the slightest ruffling of his easy,



quiet manner. "The reason that you can trust me not to have Kitty Collins reveal the name of the man we have been discussing, is that I should be exceedingly sorry to have Peter Cassett know it, and could hardly face calmly the prospect of that innocent, lovely little child growing up to a knowledge of his father! Are you answered, Mr. Fitts? I assure you that is the truth. But I also assure you, though you cannot conceive an honorable priest, that I hold a promise sacred. I pledge you my word that, Mr. Cassett righted, the guilty man will never be known."

"I agree to your conditions," said Roscoe Fitts suddenly. "And if ever I can get you, I'll pay you back with interest!"

"I agree to that!" Father Coigne actually laughed. "Good evening, Mr. Fitts."

Roscoe Fitts did not reply, and Father Coigne went to the door. Opening it, he half closed it again, and turned back to Fitts.

"I have said harsh things to you, Mr. Fitts," said the good priest. "It was a duel with the swords, and I have expressed the contempt for your actions which any decent man would feel. But actions do not necessarily comprise the man. If you will put forth another sort of manhood, I'll be as strong for you as I am against you now. It's a pity to waste a life; there's nothing left then when life's over."

Roscoe Fitts started to his feet with an imprecation. "Get out of here!" he cried.

"Well, I don't blame him for that valedictory," thought Father Coigne walking down the two flights of marble stairs, interrupted by their wide landings. "I'd resent forgiveness in his place! But it surely is a sad thing to leave a man shut out in the exterior

darkness! I wish I could open up a glimmer for him! But there's little chance that he'd see it. After all, my Peter the Great has shown him more than a glimmer! I wonder how he'll explain to Mr. Curnburn! I wonder what my dear lad will say when he finds the whole wicked scheme blown up sky high! He's no suspicion of the hold I have on Fitts; he'll never guess I meddled. Good night's work, Reverend Gregory Coigne! Now get home and finish your Office, and find out what that rascally review has to say on the subject of Socialism versus Authority and Revelation."

## CHAPTER XXII

*"A Peace above All Earthly Dignities, a Still and Quiet Conscience."*

A FEW days after Father Coigne's call upon Roscoe Fitts, Peter Cassett's telephone rang in the afternoon. Dominico answered the call.

"Mr. Cassett is not at home," he said. "He has gone to Woodcock Links; he has taken his adopted little boy and the woman working for him. Can I take a message? Who is this, please?" Dominico was always jealous of Peter's telephonic dignity, which he maintained almost with episcopal solemnity when he was left to answer calls, as he usually was.

"Oh, it's Mr. Coburn! Yes, sir; I shall tell Mr. Cassett. The first thing in the morning? I understand; I am sure he will call on you. Good-bye, Mr. Coburn."

Dominico hung up the receiver and turned to the room. He addressed Peter's chair with a long sweep of his arm upward, calling on the ceiling to witness to the chair that he, Dominico del Ponte, was a true prophet.

"Did I not tell you? Did I not say so! He has got over his craziness, and sends for you! Sometimes it is many years, but lies must die, give them time! I told you Mr. Peter, that it would come right!" Dominico extended his forefinger and threw it downward as if it were a clinical thermometer; then he shook both hands downward from their wrists, palms uppermost, showing to Peter's chair

that they held wisdom and its fulfilment.

Giles brought Peter home in his car, swung little Giles to his shoulder and ran with him into the house. Mrs. Riordan found all models of cars built too narrow between seats, unless they were seven passenger cars, with the middle chair seats folded down. Getting out was a task, but she accomplished it with audible effort, and reached the house after Peter.

"Mr. Coburn has called up to ask you to go down to see him in the morning; early in the morning, Mr. Peter!" Dominico announced, seizing little Giles from the elder Giles and beginning to divest him of his outer garments. Dominico was lost when his small tyrant was away from him.

"Whew! Hermit! How's that! Something doing as sure as guns!" cried Giles. "Mr. Coburn has got hold of something!"

"Looks like it. Unless he wants to question me," said Peter, his eyes lighting up. "I'd be mighty glad if the thing had come around. It's no fun to be accused of low-downness, but I don't honestly think that's the only thing I mind. They've been trying to make Mr. Coburn believe a Catholic was, *ipso facto*, a bad investment; you know they opposed his taking me on in the first place. And now to have them proved right, and that to an incredible degree—I It's tough!"

"It's come out! You'll see! You old brick of a Hermit!" cried Giles, putting his arm lovingly over Peter's shoulders. "You've played up to beat the band. Funny how impatient you are! I wonder at you. You've been knocked out in several separate ways, and you won't recognize it. You're one man, Pete, old chum!"

"Well, on the whole I'd rather not be a double one, sort of Siamese twin person!" said Peter. "And I'd much rather you'd not be a nut, Monk, and have hallucinations."

"All the same, if that's one, I've got 'em," declared Giles. "I'd feel like a morning-glory if the truth came out."

"Well, I'd be pretty glorious myself, and I wouldn't confine it to the morning, either," Peter agreed.

It was impossible for Peter to return to his former haunts without the possibilities which lay ahead of him setting his pulses beating rapidly. He went down in the morning at his usual time, and when he turned the corner of the street upon which Coburn, Owen and Fitts' building stood, he found himself with a moisture around his forehead, and his heart thumping quickly.

"See here, old Hop-Along, I thought you were going to take what came to you quietly, and not let yourself mind much, either way!" he rebuked himself in his thoughts. Peter had arrived before Mr. Coburn was due; the habit of getting down early was strong upon him, but he wanted to wait out of sight, not meet Mr. Coburn awkwardly as he entered, to go up to his office after he was settled in it and greet him with dignity. Therefore he turned aside, seeking Micky to while away with him the intervening time.

"Oh, say!" cried Micky rapturously as he espied Peter entering.

"Do you see by the dawn's early light? Yes, Mike, you do," observed Peter.

"Well, you back on your job?" asked Micky. "Say,

ain't it great!"

"No, Mick, I'm not back on anything, except a visit. Mr. Coburn asked me to see him," Peter checked Micky's rapture.

"What's the diff? That's what he's after. Some doin's!" Micky looked at Peter, wondering if he did not know the news. "Ain't you heard?"

"Nothing whatever," said Peter.

"Luther's gone, fired!" Micky fairly crowed the announcement. "Say, I bet he's gone to feed himself to that Fluffy! The boss ground him up too fine for anything but dog feed, or maybe chicken! Fitts turned state's evidence an' told how Selden framed you up. But Selden come back at Fitts, an' tole how they done it together. But Fitts had the drop on him, bein' what you might call his superior, if you was a complete dummy! Well, they clawed an' yowled at each other, they say, like Kilkenny cats, an' it turned out the same—they both got the bounce, though Fitts is resigned from the firm, see? The boss give 'em both what was comin' to 'em, an' Fitts was trown out. Now, come off, Peter Cassett! I know what you want to say, but I went for the fun in it, an' I got it all right, all right! J. Wesley's got a spot on him an' some deep scratches, but he ain't quit yet, an' I didn't hear what was comin' to 'um! An' you ain't heard all this! Say, you owe me two cents! Ruxtry! Mornin' Times, Joynal!" Micky ended with a newboy's call.

"It's news enough for a month, Mick! It's news for sure!" cried Peter half stunned by its magnitude. "How under the sun could you hear what happened upstairs? It must have been talked out in the office, with closed doors!"

"You bet!" Micky serenely agreed. "But closed doors ain't always thick in their cracks. That office guy up there, Tommy McMasters, he heard 'em goin' on, an' he made it his business to get on to the whole show. An' he tole me, knowin' I was a friend o' yours. You know when that sweet little Roscoe Fitts gets mad he's not soft-spoken, an' maybe he wasn't stirred up that day! Well, say! An' then some! He had goodness awful hard, all broke out on his chest, like measles! Went for Selden, an' couldn't rest contented till he'd tole the boss what a snake he was employin', didn't like you, but truth was truth! All that guff. But the boss ain't a fool; he was on, an' he asked Fitts to resign an' he'd buy his stock in the firm. So Fitts said he'd looked for it, an' he was ready. Owen sat over in the corner, I guess kinder rolled up; Tom said he didn't say peep. But he's better'n the other two. Well, they've gone, an' the boss's sent fer you, so I guess it's all come out, like the plays I see when I get enough together fer the gal'ry."

"Go to-night, Mick!" cried Peter, handing him fifty cents. "It's grand and glorious news, and it makes me feel as light as a soap bubble!"

"Well, that's the end of me story. T'anks, Peter, for the coin; you don't have to pay me fer my py-pers; I'm tickled pink over it myself," said Micky. "But 'slong 's the boss ain't in yet, I may's well tell you I got a dog myself now, an' he's got that 'Fluffy' skinned a mile! 'Tain't a dog I'm keepin' in cold storage, like we done wid Selden's; it's me own."

"Splendid, Mick! I've the best dog ever, and I know what it means to have one. What kind is yours?" cried Peter.

"Now you got me! I knew you'd ask me first off!" Micky scratched his head, pretending dismay. "He's what dey call a pure mutt, I guess; he's got all kinds o' royal fam'lies into him. I've named him U. S., 'cause he's all sorts, just like this country." Mike looked at Peter sidewise, and saw the gleam in his eyes before he laughed heartily, as Mick meant that he should laugh.

"Hard to call," suggested Peter.

"Uhk-uhk; nope!" Micky shook his head. "Slide it along fast—You—Us, You—Us! See? It goes fine. Say, he's a dandy dog! Why, when I come in at night—There's the boss, Peter! You'd better mosey along. I'll tell you next time. Awful glad you're back. The place wasn't nothin' but a hole wid crepe around its edges, since you left, see!"

"But I'm not back again, I tell you!" cried Peter. "I'm much obliged for missing me, Micky! I'll hear about that dog before long."

On his way up the hall to knock at the door of Mr. Coburn's private office, Peter was waylaid by J. Wesley Owen. He caught Peter's hand in both of his and squeezed it hard, pulling him toward his own office.

"Oh, Peter, my boy, we have fallen upon troublous times!" groaned the small man. "Roscoe has resigned from the firm; Luther is dishonorably discharged, violently discharged is not too strong a way to put it. Justin Coburn is incensed; he will hardly talk to me, Peter, yet you know I always considered him! He has said that the only man he could thoroughly trust was Peter Cassett. If the opportunity to discuss the matter comes to you, will you tell him, Peter, that you know me to be trustworthy? I am



deeply exercised; the dark waves of sorrow roll over my soul; as the hymn says."

"I've nothing against you, Mr. Owen. I suppose you'd go along all right, without Fitts. But trustworthy? Remember you urged upon me the betrayal of my employer, and were disgusted with me for refusing to help your scheme. Pretty bad case of moral astigmatism! However, I've no desire to harm you. I fancy Mr. Coburn doesn't need advice from me," replied Peter, not unkindly.

"I'm heart-broken," said J. Wesley Owen, shaking his head. "You saw straight and you followed what you saw. I'm ready to tell anyone that you are upright, high principled. I am surprised at it, but I'm constrained to say that I admire and respect you. I've no hope you will say the same of me, but at least do not crush the broken reed, Peter Cassett!"

"Not a crush!" cried Peter, heartily disliking the manner of the appeal, but sorry for the little man withal. "Excuse me, but I'm due with Mr. Coburn."

Peter got away and knocked at Mr. Coburn's office door.

"Come in!" Mr. Coburn called from his desk chair.

But when Peter opened the door, throwing it well back to allow for his impeded passage, Justin Coburn sprang to his feet, and hurried to meet him, both hands out.

"Peter! Dear boy! Welcome back, my fine Peter Cassett!" he cried and took tight hold of both of Peter's shoulders, his face smiling, but profoundly moved.

"I'm glad enough you've come back to me, stalwart Peter!"

"I'm glad enough to see you again, Mr. Coburn; I'm glad of this sort of reception," returned Peter. He was surprised to discover in himself a degree of liking for Mr. Coburn which he had not suspected. He thought that Mr. Coburn's eyes were sad, and that if he had been a woman there would have been tears in them.

"I hope that you have set it down in my credit column, when you made up your books, that I did not believe you a villain, Peter Cassett, though you made no attempt to rectify what looked like proof against you. I don't credit myself heavily with it; I ought to know enough of men to read you correctly, but at least I did see you straight," Mr. Coburn said. "Come and talk to me, my boy. I'd like to tell you the story's sequel. Take this comfortable chair. All right? You don't have pain these days, Peter?"

"No, not pain," said Peter, touched by the eager kindness, the almost maternal brooding manner with which his employer placed the chair for him, and took away his crutches. "I'm not altogether comfortable, but it's well enough, if I'm satisfied to go on crutches, and not try to be an Apollo, with my new-bought legs. There are nerve pains and pressure, still, when I try to be ornamental. Luckily I don't care as much as I did; I've given up."

"I wouldn't call it giving up—Oh, you mean the hope of walking without crutches?"

Peter did not reply to Mr. Coburn's question; he had not meant only that.

"I met Mr. Owen; he told me that Fitts has gone, also Selden. Congratulations are due you, Mr. Coburn!"

"They are indeed!" Mr. Coburn was emphatic.

"Peter, had you any lever to start Fitts on the road to reparation? He talked of his conscience, his feeling that he must make me know the truth at any personal sacrifice, but I have his measure! Had you a weapon, a bayonet to prod him up?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Coburn! I haven't moved hand, nor—Well, I couldn't move a foot!—in the matter since I saw you. I had no sort of hold on that man, and I've no clue to his reformation—which you don't seem to take seriously!"

"Well, not his reformation, but certainly his story. I would have said that you—or someone—had given him a short margin and a choice between evils, and that owning up to me was the lesser which he chose. I was sure it was you; that you had been generous enough to hold your tongue to me, but had forced him to act. No?" Mr. Coburn eyed Peter sharply.

"No, not at all, Mr. Coburn. I don't know a thing about it, didn't know there was a change in the situation till this morning," Peter assured him.

"Fitts laid all the blame on Luther Selden, but I know Luther! He's been written down a scamp by this transaction, fast enough, but he never was the prime mover. However, he is a rascal; I didn't want to be kept waiting to see him go. Fitts made no effort to dissuade me from asking him to get out of the firm. That's singular! Well, if you really don't know—At any rate I'm rid of them both! Owen—I haven't made up my mind whether I'd better insist on taking over Owen's stock, also, or not?" Mr. Coburn waited for a suggestion from Peter.

"Well," Peter said hesitantly, "I think Mr. Owen has had a jolt to his complacency. He has been suffering from obliquity of vision and principles, but I

imagine he has had effectual treatment. He's not so bad; he's weaker than he is wicked."

"Do I want a weak partner?" Mr. Coburn laughed. "However, I see your point, and he is useful on account of certain connections he's mixed up in. Never mind him; he'll do as he is, for the present, anyway. What I especially have to say is that I want a partner, a man to come into the firm who does not bring capital to it, but brings youth, good brains, level-headed judgment, above all incorruptible principles, one I like, who, I hope, likes me. Know such an one, Peter Cassett?"

Peter shook his head, but the blood reddened his face to his hair; there was no misunderstanding the look which Mr. Coburn bent upon him, leaning forward to do so, a smile on his lips, inexpressible kindness in his eyes.

"I know a man like that, Peter," he said. "A man known to me from his childhood, who has always been, from the days of his playing games with other children, a boy that spoke the truth and was honest. Will that boy come into my firm, Peter?"

Peter could not reply for a moment; then he said:

"He must always be grateful to you, Mr. Coburn, for so much as thinking of him. But he is down and out now; he would not be useful to you."

"Poppycock, Peter!" cried Mr. Coburn. "He has been useful to me all along. See here, Peter, I want to take you into this concern. I could not find another man who would be to me what you would be, have proved that you are. I want the firm name Coburn, Owen and Cassett—provided we keep J. Wesley on. Will you come in, Peter; stand by me again and for the rest of my life? Then,

when that life ends, carry on the concern on its established basis of irrefragable contracts; carry it on for yourself and your adopted son—for anyone else for whom, by that time, you are working?"

"Mr. Coburn, not many fellows of my age get an offer like this," said Peter. "Not even when they are sound, still less when they are—cripples! You can see for yourself that you've bowled me over; I surely am grateful. But—don't think I'm a black hearted wretch, nor quite mad!—I don't know! May I have a few days to consider this wonderful offer that anyone, not a candidate for an asylum, would jump at? May I have a month? I don't know what is wrong with me, but I don't feel this minute as if I could take it."

"Why, Peter?" asked Mr. Coburn gently.

"I don't know," Peter shook his head slowly. "Honestly I don't know. I'm still in the ring; I have lots of fun; I'm not unhappy; on the contrary, I'm happier than most people. But I don't feel like starting in, not at anything. I feel relaxed, let down, and as if I couldn't brace up again. It's as though I could go on and on, talking, playing, working, reading, looking after Giles, little Giles—we named the boy I took for Giles Guernsey—contented to wait till it was done, my job you know, the one that was set me to do, but that I'd be rather glad when a Hand took away my tools and said: Time to knock off, Peter Cassett! Rest time!"

"Why, Peter!" Mr. Coburn spoke under his breath and his eyes filled with tears. "Are you feeling like that? And we thought you were happy! That's the way I feel, but I'm fifty-seven years old, and I've no end in view—except Justine! I thought

your faith would buoy you up; you speak my language, and I've no faith!"

"Oh, no, Mr. Coburn, I doubt it's in the same key!" Peter corrected him. "I've not said to anyone what I've just said to you; I don't know why I said it. I am happy; you were right to think I was happy! I can wait, hipple along as I do till I'm eighty, if God wants me to wait so long. But I'm *waiting*; you're not! It's not getting over and done with it all for me. It's being called off by Someone for whom I've worked, called to a perfected, unutterably happy, intensely living, Eternal life! It is not ending, you see—that '*Thanatopsis*' sort of desire to rest."

"You're right; that's the best I know, anticipate," said Mr. Coburn. "I'm by no means waiting. If there's nothing beyond, I can't wait for nothing, can I? But it's a tiresome thing to go on for over half a century, with age ahead and death ultimately, however delayed. I'd be glad to end. I'm a successful man; I enjoy books, the play, some people, a well-cooked dinner, comfortable chair and bed. That's about the inventory—and Justine! I'd never weigh in the balance the loss against the gain of getting out of it, if it weren't for Justine."

"That I may see Thy Countenance unfolding  
And may be blest Thy glory in beholding,"

murmured Peter.

"What are you saying?" asked Mr. Coburn.

"Just the last two lines of the hymn I say many times every day, a Latin hymn; St. Thomas Aquinas wrote it, the *Adoro Te Devote*," said Peter. "Yes,

Mr. Coburn, we may use similar terms, but our feeling is different. I not only wait, but I find waiting irksome."

"Paul talked about longing 'to be dissolved and be with Christ.' I always wondered if he really meant that! I never could get it. Apparently you are conveying the same aspiration, the same illumined faith? Wonderful! To soar above tangible proofs and experience! I envy you, Peter! Then you want to delay your decision as to my offer?" said Mr. Coburn.

"A little while, please, but I can't tell you how it has bowled me over," said Peter rising to go. "Mr. Coburn, beyond words I truly thank you."

"You needn't, Peter my dear boy; with all my heart I want you and would count the gain all mine," said Mr. Coburn pressing Peter's hand in a grip that left finger marks on its back.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*"If the Rascal Have Not Given Me Medicines to  
Make Me Love Him, I'll Be Hanged!"*

**S**TILL curiously hanging back from an offer that would have been advantageous to an older man, Peter compromised upon it and returned to serve Mr. Coburn as before, inspecting the output of the factory pending his decision.

"I can't make out what ails me, Father," Peter said to Father Coigne when he went to see him one evening to make final arrangements to umpire the ball game which was to end St. John's school year of athletics in a burst of glory for its nine.

"Nothing serious, I'd say, Peter," returned the priest. "You look well, in good health, soul and body. What does it feel like, this that ails you?"

"Restlessness, dissatisfaction, hard to keep it from being discontent," said Peter. "I'm not rebelling; if God wants me to serve Him on crutches, so be it! But I want to go off on them, to go somewhere, or go into something, I don't know—Father, did you ever think I might do for a lay brother somewhere? I think they could use me?"

"Use you fast enough in lots of ways!" cried Father Coigne. "Yes, I've considered it, Peter, but I don't advise your going now. I should object to your going because you were restless. It's not a state of mind in which to make great decisions. Wait a bit, Peter; there's plenty of time; you're still young. I suspect that you must go through several phases



before you finally settle down into your permanent attitude of mind. They say, the doctors say, that a loss like yours is a tremendous shock to the system, a physical shock; that it takes a long time for the body to adjust to its deprivation. It surely takes as long for the soul to learn the new way to save itself. I advise you to think as little as you can of what you want, how you feel, lean out silently, listening and feeling for guidance. The thing for you to do, Peter, is to keep yourself out of your own way as much as possible now, and listen to hear the plan for you unfolded. Hard for such a steam engine, isn't it, Peter the Great? So much the better, as well as the wiser, thing to do!"

"Yes, Father. I've been having a sneaking idea that I must not try to force issues," said Peter submissively. "Father, I'm getting to like that baby a good deal!"

"Naturally! He's a winning young villain, and dependent upon you; how could you resist his combination? He's as good for you as you are for him, Peter. You must confess that I did a good stroke of work when I brought you together!" said Father Coigne.

"Ready enough to acknowledge it!" Peter endorsed him. "If it weren't for little Giles, life would be a howling wilderness—life would do the wilderness part and I'd probably do the howling! As it is—that little chap runs to meet me now, Father! And he talks well; some letters throw him, but you get on to his alphabet! He's an affectionate person! All I have to do is to sit back in my chair and ignore him, if he does what he shouldn't! It fills him with imperfect contrition, and sets him on the high way

to model behavior, coaxing me with every blandishment he knows—he knows a lot! After all, it ought to be a baby form of perfect contrition, for its motive is pure love of me, who am the highest thing he knows.”

“What about him, if you were a lay brother?” hinted Father Coigne.

“There you are!” cried Peter. “I don’t suppose I could go off and leave him now.”

“When you do go, or if you have to leave him to go anywhere to stay, Peter, leave the child to Justine Coburn. Make a will appointing her to take care of him, and do it soon. One never is sure of a day, and Justine would love to have the boy, I think.”

Father Coigne waited for Peter’s expostulation, nor had he long to wait.

“Justine! Oh, no; you mean Isabelle and Giles, don’t you? Justine would be the ideal woman to train a boy, if it weren’t for her fundamental lack. Are you urging me to leave the child to an agnostic?” cried Peter.

“Don’t recall mentioning an agnostic,” said Father Coigne pretending to consider. “But bequeath Giles Esperance to Justine Coburn. I’ll watch over him, but I’ll also guarantee her. Justine is the sort of woman one meets, possibly, if he’s exceedingly fortunate, thrice in a lifetime. I find I think of her as a beautiful marble shaft that stands firm on the good earth, but rears its head high into sunshine and sky. Do you think of the people you know in images, rather than in terms of words, Peter? I do, and Justine is the one marble shaft I see. When there’s a cross on its apex—ah, how high and beautiful it will stand!”

"A cross? Father Coigne, is Justine coming?" Peter exclaimed.

"I don't see her!" Father Coigne looked out of the window, up and down the street. "However, don't disregard my advice; arrange that she is to have the baby, if you are not allowed to stay with him. You look quite likely to live to tell little Giles' children about the ball game that you umpired for a queer little priest who used to be here, one Father Gregory Coigne! It is hard on Justine that you are such a strong rascal, Peter; I'm sure that she would dearly like to get her hands on that small scamp of yours!"

"She gets them on him fairly often as it is, Father!" laughed Peter. "If I weren't as nobly generous as I am, I'd be jealous of the boy's love for Justine." Peter went home slowly, considering Father Coigne's hinted news; he knew that the hint would not have been groundlessly given.

Justine a Catholic! He had seen how possible this great change was to her, yet it amazed him and profoundly moved him to think of it as actual, near at hand. There was in her that tremendous force for good, that capacity for something not far removed from sanctity, which made it easy to conceive of her, not merely a Catholic, but a contemplative, perhaps in Carmel. Yet offsetting this was her intellectuality, of the type that exaggerates the power, the value of human intellect aloof from the Holy Spirit. "Justine was not womanly," thought Peter, falling back on the term that was so fatal to his understanding of poor Justine. If she had been womanly he could better imagine her, when it came to the issue, submitting her will, with love, to God.

Justine was to drive Peter, little Giles and Dominico to the game between the Hasketburg club and the St. John's nine, and after that, Dominico having gone to see his friends at the Claw, Justine was going home with Peter for a cup of tea in his own house.

The day was sharp enough to make little Giles' cheeks feel deliciously cold and firm, like apples freshly gathered after sundown in October, and their color, glowing in their white frame of soft angora wool, would have shamed the apples.

"You precious creature!" cried Justine kissing the cold cheeks alternately.

"*You pwecious!*" The baby gave Justine the retort courteous, adding at once: "Giles-I shall dwive!"

"Funny Giles-I!" cried Justine with a happy laugh, echoing the baby's invariable way of combining name and pronoun.

She gathered him into her lap and let him put his white mittened hands between hers on the wheel.

"Justine, I shall always protest, though you will always do it, I suppose! But that kid must be in your way there!" Peter expostulated.

"Oh, so little in the way, Peter! I can manage; you know I never have come to grief, and he is so happy! It takes so little self-sacrifice to set him up on a pinnacle!" Justine said, pressing close to herself the thick little white bundle that was Master Giles' body, as she made ready to manipulate her car.

Master Giles turned to Peter with a scowl.

"Giles-I can dwive like a angel, Gwawd, an' you must to *not* int'fwere," he said sternly, immediately adding: "Do angels dwive auty-caws, Gwawd? Little angels like Giles-I?"

"He doesn't think I know about angels, Guard!"

laughed Justine, bending around the baby to throw in her gears.

There was a radiance in Justine's face that was new to it. She looked girlish, almost pretty. Her eyes and her lips laughed; Peter thought he had never seen her like this, then, curiously, remembered that he had, recalling her eighth birthday party when Justine had been glorified by the gift of her fine piano, and had sparkled with joy as, whether as child or woman, Justine rarely sparkled.

Peter remembered Father Coigne's hint, and wondered what the change in Justine might mean. He did not think that the mere decision to put her doubts underfoot and enter the Catholic Church would give her such joy as shone in her eyes, nor was it likely that, even when she had been baptized, she would at once be so completely happy. Peter knew converts and that, usually at most, their first sensible gain was repose of mind that the great question was settled, but that rapturous joy was rarely a gift received at the entrance door by those who went home from journeying afar.

Peter swung out of the car on his crutches and went at once over to his post as umpire of the game. Justine and little Giles crossed over to the roofed-in seats, politely called the Grand Stand, where the ladies, mostly exceedingly youthful ladies, sat to watch the game.

Many eyes were turned to Justine as she crossed the strip of grass back of the benches, and went along them to the Grand Stand, leading Peter Cassett's adopted child by the hand. It was strange, but wholly true, that Justine was completely unconscious, with the unconsciousness of supreme indifference, to

the speculations, the gossip which her friendship for Peter warranted—and now she was behaving almost as an adopted mother to Peter's adopted son!

"Which she means to be, it's likely," said a woman now watching Justine's approach.

"Trust him to marry her, if she'll marry him, as she will! Cripple or not, why wouldn't he take Justin Coburn's daughter, with all she'd bring him? And he's all right, Peter Cassett is! If he did lose his legs, he's ten times the man most of 'em are, let them be with two or twenty legs!"

Sister Nicola's placid elderly face brightened at the sight of Justine and little Giles; she gathered the full skirt of her habit to her, making room beside her for Justine and the baby, and smiled affectionately upon them.

"Justine dear, and how are you?" Sister Nicola asked warmly. "How is my daughter?"

"She is well, Sister dear," answered Justine, "and so happy that she feels her eyes smiling at everyone, almost as yours do, Sister-Mother!"

"That's right, dear child! And this other dear child! No need to ask about him! Now isn't that a boy for you? Will you cheer the boys, Giles, when they begin to play?" Sister Nicola bent over to kiss Giles' cheek, at the same time insinuating a red and white stick of candy into his hand.

"Pep'mint! Franks you, Sister! Take off my mittums, Dusty. I'll holler loud, Sister. Gwawd is rumpririn'," said the baby, never in the least decomposed by anything unexpectedly good that came his way.

Peter was to umpire seated behind the catcher, but before the game had gone far it proved that it

would be close, with good pitching and fielding on both sides, to support it. Peter swung out to stand behind the pitcher; the St. John's pitcher was using the twist that Peter had taught him.

"Do you think that they cheer him less than when he first came out, after he was hurt? Do you think they are forgetting how glorious he is?" asked Justine jealously.

Sister Nicola smiled, a sweet, half-sad smile.

"Justine, dear, do you expect people to remember? Never shall I forget Peter, never! But I love him. I always loved Peter Cassett, the young scamp that he was, better than any other boy I ever taught, and I always liked the boys best, Justine, because they were the naughtiest! But so generous, loyal and devoted with the mischief! And Peter the biggest rascal and the biggest angel of them all! But, yes; I think they are beginning to take Peter for granted, to forget something of his heroism. Justine, we remember because we love Peter, but human beings always forget unless they are endowed with love. It's only Infinite Love that remembers and keeps our victories in Its Sacred Heart. That's why the world is not worth clinging to, daughter."

"Yes, Sister; I know," said Justine softly. She turned her wonderful eyes to Sister Nicola's peaceful ones, wise with life's experience, peaceful because of other experience beyond this life.

"If I am not needed, Sister," Justine said, speaking low.

"If you are needed in the world it will not be because you remain a part of it," returned the elder woman.

The game ended with a victory of but two runs in

favor of the home team.

There was cheering enough now, and the umpire got a round to himself. The boys of St. John's again flocked around Peter, admiring him, eager for his notice. The captain of the Hasketburg team came up to Peter and Justine saw the St. John's captain introduce him. They were a fine manly pair of boys, visibly paying tribute to Peter, the champion who had never come home on his shield, but with it, and yet who lay now outstretched upon it; never vanquished, always a warrior, yet never again able to fight on his old fields, with his proper weapons.

"Oh, after all, boys know what it must mean to him!" thought Justine. "They are too good sports wholly to lose sight of this best of sports, my patient, strong, brave uncomplaining Peter!"

Little Giles was satisfactory. He was yelling till his round face was redder than ever, and his voice was getting hoarse.

"I think I'd stop now, Giles; the game is over, and you'll have a sore throat," suggested Justine.

"Giles-I is yellin' for Gwawd; Gwawd isn't over, is he? Is Gwawd rumpririn' now? Anyhow Giles-I's yellin' for him, 'cause he's the bestest, an' he's the one walks on cwutches; rest of 'em has just plain legs!" declared Giles, and resumed his yells.

"The baby has said it!" commented Sister Nicola, drawing her hands out of her capacious sleeves to gather Giles to her for a parting embrace which he found inopportune. "Come to the convent soon, Justine dear, and ask Peter to lend you Giles to visit us."

In the car Justine once more resumed the wheel, but this time Peter managed to restrain the baby



from incommoding her by holding him close to his own side and plunging into a spirited account of how the ball was pitched and caught.

Giles listened intently. "Shall you teach Giles-I, Gwawdy Peter?" he asked. "Shall my ball go all twisty, and put 'em out? Shall you make me a spowt, wunnin' waces and twistin' balls and ev'wy thing?"

"Surest thing you know, Giles Secundus! Your Guard will make you a sport, running, jumping, playing ball, if he can!" cried Peter. "What's the best sport, the only true sport, old man?"

"Playin' the game stwaight, tellin' twuth, love God best, and chose Him Captain!" said the baby, so promptly that it was evident that this was a short liturgy of question and answer between him and his Guard.

"Oh, Peter!" said Justine softly, "what a lucky baby, and what a code!"

In Peter's living room Justine dropped upon a low chair and called Giles to her. She drew off his mittens, unfastened his coat and pulled off his kitten-like hood, smoothing his glowing hair, which was not yet abundant, but was coming in promisingly, and seemed to grow a little brighter in color all the time.

Mrs. Riordan, bringing in the tea service and small alcohol kettle, watched Justine with a divided mind, revealed by the expression of her face, at once friendly and forbidding. Above all things she wanted Justine and Peter to marry; above all things she most disliked having anyone but herself do the least service for the baby. Consequently her face was inscrutable now, as her contradictory feelings were inexplicable to herself.

Mrs. Riordan withdrew, reconciled by Giles' trot-

ting off with her. He well knew that whereas Justine and Peter would allow him a definite number of those desirable, thin sweet wafers on the table, "Ridie" would give him them without stint, and that consequently his best interest now lay in following Ridie.

"Sugar, and a good deal of sugar, isn't it, Peter?" said Justine, assuming her office of lady, the dispenser of bread.

She passed Peter his cup and the thin bread and butter, helping herself, and leaning back in her chair, nibbling and sipping with manifest satisfaction.

"Isn't it fine to come back, and find one's home still standing?" she laughed.

"It is not a magnificent house, Peter, but it is a cozy little shack! I think Giles will look back to it when he's older, as having been a cheerful place for a small boy to develop in, and that's a whole lot to a man; I'm sure of it! Peter, why aren't you my father's partner? Why aren't you making it Coburn, Owen and Cassett? Do you know how anxious for it my father is?"

"Why, I don't know!" Peter hesitated. "He told me he would like it that way, and he does seem anxious about it. I don't know why I hesitate, Justine, but I can't seem to see myself fitted for it. Do you know, Justine, today for the first time, I felt down and out among those boys! I don't mean that I haven't realized all along how finished I was; it doesn't take keen senses to show a man with both legs amputated that he's not precisely an athlete. But today I felt that I was done for, down and out even in sympathy, getting old, perhaps!" Peter laughed at himself, but he was in earnest. "I don't

think I'll umpire many more times, nor do anything around the lads, unless the Sisters call me in to help them teach catechism!" Again Peter laughed.

"If you could have heard Sister Nicola today speak of you, you'd say she might want you for anything she could get you to do," Justine told him. "Nonsense, Peter! You aren't one bit down and out; you are up and in! What has come over you? And it is late in the day to feel discouraged; the crucial time is past."

"Is it? Not till a man is dead," said Peter. "On the contrary, I think I'm feeling the accumulated effect of the thing. Not that it matters. I hope I'm not getting so far down and out as to start whining! About the partnership, Justine; I can't explain myself, but it strikes me peculiarly, as if it were too—too final! Foolish thing to say, but it's about right. You see, as an inspector, an employe, I'm on the surface; as a partner I'd be immersed. I feel as though I belonged now on the outside of things. Queer sort of twist in my brain! However, if it matters to your father, I'll take it. You know I appreciate the offer; any man twice, thrice my value would be delighted to have it!"

"Oh, Peter, I am glad!" cried Justine, the truth of her statement quite visible in her face. "I told father I would try to persuade you. Indeed he wants you, Peter; he's fond of you. My father is splendid, and he is not happy. He carries a grief in his heart which no one knows, but I guess, I guess! He is splendid, Peter! He does the right thing at a cost, yet undeviatingly, and this with only honor to stimulate and sustain him; no religious faith, no supernatural motive. My poor, dear, splendid

father!"

"But you have always said that honor sufficed, Justine. You did not have a supernatural motive, and you, too, have kept the law, as you read it," said Peter.

"I know now that honor does not suffice," said Justine. "I know now the infinite difference which you tried to show me, between natural virtue and supernatural love and grace. Peter, don't you want me to be pleased, too? I want you in the firm!"

"Surest thing in the world I want you to be pleased, dear Justine," said Peter. "Do you honestly care about it?"

"Don't you think, Peter, one would care to have an old friend get on? But don't you think one must still more want that person to get on, to be prominent before the world, with means to do what needs doing, when he is of one's own religion?" asked Justine.

She leaned forward as she spoke, rather breathlessly, her color coming and going, her lips smiling, her eyes shining, yet wet with tears. At that moment Justine Coburn was beautiful.

"Justine!" cried Peter. "Do you mean—you do mean, you must mean—Are you a Catholic? Have you come, Justine?"

"Oh, Peter, you stupid Peter, not to know!" Justine cried, and Peter did not know this new, playful, joyous young Justine.

"When my head is all dewy with the baptismal water, and my forehead shining with chrism! And the joy of heaven is in my soul, leaping beyond bounds, overflowing upon you, dear old Peter, who showed me the way, and upon all the world! I am

so glad, so *glad*, Peter, to be where I am, all the old emptiness filled, all the old doubting silenced! And you, you, Peter, my childhood's playmate, you taught me what it was! The great old Church, the ancient-new Church! I was baptized yesterday, Peter, and Sister Nicola is my godmother. Peter, please thank God!"

"Justine, Justine, indeed I do!" cried Peter, looking at Justine as if she revealed to him something wonderful, something beyond knowledge, for the miracle of this being Justine Coburn overwhelmed even him, used as he was to the joy which she had newly found. Justine sprang to her feet, threw her coat over her shoulder, set her hat firmly on her hair.

"I can't stay longer after telling you this, Peter. I'd rather not talk any longer of it, and we couldn't speak of lesser things. Come to see me. To-night is Thursday, your hour of Adoration. Will you make it filled with thanksgiving, dear Peter?" she cried.

"With all my heart, dear Justine, with all my heart and soul! And all the years which I may live I will still thank God for coming into such a soul as yours," answered Peter softly.

They clasped hands, and Justine was gone.

## CHAPTER XXIV

*"The Idea of Her Life Shall Sweetly Creep into His Study of Imagination."*

PETER told Mr. Coburn that he would become the third partner in the firm of Coburn, Owen and—after his accession—Cassett. It was arranged that he should formally be taken into partnership at the beginning of the year; it was then the last day, save one, in October, so that Peter still had two months left him as inspector.

"I'm more glad than I can say that you have decided as you have, Peter," said Mr. Coburn. "Justine had prepared me for your announcement. There are many reasons why I want you as a partner; I have told you some of them."

"It surely is a great thing for me," replied Peter. "I've said that over and over, and thought it often between saying it. It wasn't blindness to my own interest, nor ingratitude to you that made me hesitate—it was plain foolishness, I suppose! I can't get hold of the feeling which held me back. I'm glad enough if it pleases you, Mr. Coburn; I'd do something much worse than advance my own interests to gratify you, let alone to serve you! You've stood by me, made me start out as a man among men when I was no longer fully a man on equal terms with others, and I'd do anything within my power for you."

"Ah, well, Peter, there's no need of words between us! You've proved your loyalty. As the

young partner of a man who will soon grow old you'll have plenty of chance to help me out. Justine told you that she had gone over to your faith, Peter?" Mr. Coburn asked, and it seemed to Peter Justine's father was watching him closely as he said:

"Yes, she told me, Mr. Coburn. I don't know how you feel about it; sorry, of course. But there's that in Justine which I'd think might make you glad she had done it."

"And so I am. I know precisely what you mean. It seems like a blur in a fine picture, a flaw in a beautiful marble, to have a girl like Justine, with her intensity, her capacity for devotion to a big thing, her power of mind, her spirituality, living without faith. Those qualities would have prevented her accepting anything illogical—like Christianity made over by men. She'd have remained an agnostic unless she had done what she has done. Of course no one would dream of suspecting that Justine was less than wholly, flawlessly sincere in taking the step. I am able to rejoice in the joy I see in her. But it will separate her from her relatives, and her old associates to some extent. I cannot but regret that Justine has severed herself from us, made herself in a sense, and an actual sense, an exile among her kindred. However, I made no attempt to deter her; she knows her own mind." Mr. Coburn spoke with deep feeling, as if Peter would grasp his meaning, as he did.

"You are a wonder at understanding, Mr. Coburn!" he cried. "I've often thought that what you say is true. Justine's step may—it must—color her entire future; possibly get in the way of its running smoothly, but surely it will compensate her a thousandfold! There is one thing that you can't grasp,

Mr. Coburn, and that is what she has gained. It's not difference of view, nor getting things settled, it is—" Peter hesitated, stopped.

"The Real Presence," Mr. Coburn said for him. "Naturally, I cannot conceive your believing what you do, what there is no mistaking that you do actually, vitally believe. But granted that you believe it, I can guess dimly what it might mean. I am sure it is the explanation of Justine's overflowing new joy. I am half afraid that my girl may turn from me to a convent, Peter. Unless she finds her life work, her happiness in the world, it would be like the nature which we have agreed was hers, to go to a cloister, a strict cloister at that, and give herself up to the mysterious power of that life so far beyond us to understand, and which, consequently, most of us, Protestants, cordially dislike."

"I half believe that Justine will do just that, Mr. Coburn. She is a contemplative, a mystic. It would almost kill her to leave you lonely, yet Justine is not one to stop at a martyrdom," said Peter.

Mr. Coburn sighed. He looked at Peter with sad, kind, puzzled eyes.

"I do not think that she is going to find her satisfying place in the world that will hold her in it," he said.

The next day, a Sunday and the last day of October, was everything that the Hallow E'en of All Saints should be. When Peter went to Mass at seven there was a sting in the air that suggested nuts dropping out beyond the river, and which made his top-coat welcome, buttoned across. But when he came out of the church the sun, shining somewhat above the horizon, about on a level with Peter's head, was



drawing to himself a white veil of mist over toward the river, and had already warmed the air into that mellow softness which is like a caress, warm, without the scorch of summer heat.

Peter, the baby and Dominico were going out for dinner at two and to spend the afternoon at Woodcock Links with Isabelle and Giles; Canis Major was especially invited to be of the party. Canis Major, without loving Peter less, had divided his life between Peter and little Giles. He no longer drooped so melancholy while Peter was gone, though he adored him as ever on his return. He seemed to feel that the baby was his responsibility, and, like all loving hearts, Canis Major did not spend his days moping, now that he had a charge to keep.

Isabelle, little Peter clinging to her hand, was at the door to welcome Peter and his family. She was no longer the fragile, sylph-like Isabelle of her girlhood, but she was not less beautiful. On the contrary, her face with its starry eyes, the unmistakable eyes of a devoted mother, her sweet lips deepening in their corners with their tender kisses on small faces, was more lovely than the charming, unformed girl. There was a little daughter now, not yet reached the point when she welcomed guests, another Isabelle, but called by the English equivalent of her name to avoid confusion—little Elizabeth.

“Giles went down on a hurry call to our neighbor’s, to pull him out of a difficulty with his car—just as you used to do for me, Peter! Remember? Only you had so much farther to come! What a selfish, incompetent goose I was! And how patient you were, Peter dear! Kiss your godfather, son, and hug little Giles well! What a boy that is, Peter!

Only see; he is more than a half head taller than Peter, and ever so much bulkier!" cried Isabelle, stooping to take little Giles in her arms before she let "Peter & Company," as she called them, pass into the house.

"He's a whale," Peter declared cheerfully. "But I feed *this* youngster well, Isabelle! Don't take so much pains with his menu as you do with my godson's. I've an idea he gets good out of all that he can digest, and, as far as I know, that's everything he can get! He doesn't get much footling stuff, pasty and the like."

"It's so funny to hear you talking of a child's diet in this authoritative way, like a pediatricist, only no pediatricist would ever utter the heterodox doctrines you preach!" cried Isabelle. "But I love it, Peter! The baby, Elizabeth, is getting to be quite nice, Peter! You'll see her after a while. Shall we arrange for her to marry little Giles when she grows up?"

Having said which, Isabelle blushed, remembering something that she was usually happily able to forget nowadays.

"No, sir, Isabelle! This boy is going to be a monk, and go out to convert the heathen! I'm going to build him up into an athletic chap that the heathen are bound to admire; they'll eat out of his hand—because it's a hand that can make a formidable fist," declared Peter.

Giles came hurrying back, throwing down his hat and greeting Peter with both hands, and with the kiss of welcome, forbidden to his race, leaping out of his eyes to his beloved Hermit.

"Come on outdoors, old Hermit; I've got a lot to

show you and to say to you, without these trammels!" He indicated Isabelle and the two small boys with his thumb, and Isabelle twisted her mouth and tilted back her head, "making a face" at her husband.

"Go along; I don't mind!" she cried. "This afternoon you're to take yourself off to some solitude, I don't care where, and Peter and I are going to have a real visit; maybe teach each other pretty new knitting stitches!"

Whatever had come and gone between their boyhood and that day, Peter and Giles were no less to each other for the passage of years and their burden of changes. Just as when they were in knickerbockers, Giles chattered rapidly to Peter, showing him proposed alterations in the rear of the house, which should throw out a bow-windowed nursery for the children, toward the south, where the sun would lie in it all the day long. He showed Peter his idea for a pergola conducting to the garden beyond, wherein Isabelle could sit on warm days. He showed Peter the trenches of his celery, not yet taken up for the winter, all the while talking fast and eagerly, true Giles-fashion, with a hand on Peter's shoulder.

Just as always, Peter listened to Giles, admiring him, loving him, happy to be with him in this unbroken intimacy; occasionally throwing in a suggestion that was practical, more often a ridiculing comment; but, just as always, proud of the talent, the charm, the quickness of eye, tongue and hand of his beloved Monk.

Little Peter came running out. He was a slender little child, with a serious face, much like his mother's, but with less of her animation. He was a thoughtful little creature who did not know much

about romping, and who, consequently, puzzled and somewhat annoyed little Giles.

"Mr. Giles Guernsey," said Peter the Second, speaking as plainly as an adult, "Mrs. Guernsey, my mother, told me to tell you that Father Coigne has come, and you and my Mr. Godfather had better come in *at once*, and wash your hands. She told me 'special to say: *At Once!*, hard, like that."

All right, Mercury! Mercury ran errands for the gods and goddesses, Petey—we'll obey instantler! Your mother is a martinet!" declared Giles.

This somewhat staggered little Peter.

"Do you mean Mater? That's what you make me call her in Latin," he said.

"I mean She-Who-Must-Be-Obedyed!" returned Giles, swinging his grave little son to his shoulder and heading for the house.

Father Coigne made a welcome frequent guest at dinner in this house; he came without a special invitation, but never could linger long after the dinner. He had a big catechism class at the Claw, at which he was due by half past three; he had to be served his coffee with his roast, not wait for the post prandial small cup. Truth to tell, he preferred the big coffee cup, and with plenty of cream and sugar besides! Today when Father Coigne was going out to get into his little roadster to drive to the Claw, he turned back, and spoke low to the three elders, so that his voice might not reach the second Peter and Giles, happily shooting nuts, like marbles, on the floor.

"Kitty Collins, little Giles' poor young mother, is dead and buried, Peter," he said. "She was buried Friday. I attended her several times before she

died. She would have liked to see the baby, but willingly made that last act of renunciation when I pointed out to her that he might remember her farewell in later years. I promised her that you and I would train him up so that, by and by, there would be no parting between them. She was so humble, so contrite, and by no means ever wicked! She never wilfully chose to do wrong! I thought you would want to know that Giles' mother is at peace."

"Can I have a Mass for her the day after to-morrow? All Souls'? Of course I can't! Well, put her in your Mass for me, and I'll have Masses later. I hope the boy's father will never bother him," said Peter.

"No fear!" said Father Coigne. "He's prospering in this world, as his sort does, but I'd rather be Kitty Collins! Justine Coburn is coming to the Claw to-day; she is going to help me with the children there. She asked me to tell you, Peter, that now you need not fear her influence among them!"

"Not a bit!" cried Peter. "Tell Justine she may go ahead, *permissu superiorum!*"

"I am going to drive down with you, Father, if you don't mind," said Giles. "There is a man I've got to see, to talk about his house plan, whom I can't see except on Sunday. Isabelle will drive Peter & Company home, and pick me up to bring me back."

"Glad to have you come along, Giles," said the priest, "but don't keep me waiting."

"Only while I get hat and coat!" said Giles, and ran away, almost instantly reappearing, prepared for the drive.

"Good-bye, Hermit! I've had a dandy day with you. Wish I didn't have to cut it off! It's ripping

the way we grow old together! Come out every Sunday; I need you!" Giles cried.

"Not as much as I need you, Monk, you nuisance!" declared Peter. "All right; I'll come every Sunday, and maybe move out altogether and live in your new pergola!"

"Can't scare me that way! I'll even board up its sides and put in a furnace, if you'll live in my backyard!" cried Giles.

With a violent slap on Peter's shoulder, returned with interest by a slap on his back from Peter, Giles ran down the steps and jumped into the car in which Father Coigne was impatiently waiting for him.

"You two are a comfort to see together," said Isabelle, turning back into the house with Peter. "If ever I were tempted to cynicism, your beautiful life-long friendship would cure me! For it will be life-long, Peter!"

"Well, rather!" said Peter. "I'm good to stick to Monk till ninety odd."

Isabelle drew Peter's chair nearer to the window, but he forestalled her with her own.

"It's a pity not to look at the color while we talk. The leaves are falling fast after last night's frost; they have stayed on unusually long," said Isabelle. "Peter, dear, are we almost as good friends as you and Giles? I mean don't we feel almost as much mutual confidence, and wouldn't we each trust the other almost equally?"

"Why as to all that, Isa, we are quite as good friends as Giles and I are!" declared Peter. "We ought to know about how we stand toward each other by this time, and we do! What do you want to say? That prelude could only mean that you're

afraid to say something to me! Nothing you could say needs to be balked at, Isabelle!"

Isabelle laughed. "You do know me, Peter the Great!" she cried. "Well, then, I want you to let me ask you: What about Justine?"

"What about her? Well, what about her! What do you mean, Isa?" asked Peter.

"What will you do, now that she is a Catholic?" Isabelle asked, and her manner conveyed what her words did not embody.

"I! I do, now that—Isabelle, what do you mean? You don't, you can't mean—"

"I can, for I do!" Isabelle forestalled Peter in what he could not bring himself to say. "Will you not marry her, Peter? There; it is said!"

"Oh, Isabelle! It should not be said!" cried Peter in distress.

"Peter, yes; it should be!" Isabelle went on, leaning forward, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands on her knee. "You are so preoccupied with your misfortune, it looms before you so big that it shuts out your true vision. You are charming, Peter; you are brave, manly, clever and good! Oh, Peter, we all know what you are! But most of all, Justine! She loves you! Peter, are you blind that you can't see it?" Her father sees it, and he has all but asked you to marry his beloved girl, yet you could not hear him speaking out of his anxious love for her!"

"Isabelle! Please!" Peter protested.

"I think that she feared to yield herself to the Church lest she might deceive herself; she was so fond of you that she feared to act, lest, unconsciously, she was acting to please you," Isabelle went on

resolutely. "You would be so blest and happy in her, Peter! You are fonder of her than of anyone else in the world, unless it is Giles."

"But I do not love her as I would have loved my wife," said Peter. "That is a beastly thing to say, but I would never offer Justine a man doubly maimed, a cripple, whose capability of loving is also gone lame. She's too fine for that!"

"It's not—not that you love anyone else, Peter?" said Isabelle timidly.

"It is not the old dream, the old hope, Isabelle. I am fond of you as my dear sister, the wife of my more-than brother. It is not that. But I am crippled in feeling, bankrupt. I could not love a woman. Oh, Isabelle, everything in me revolts from the suggestion, precisely as if it were another maimed unfortunate, not myself, we were discussing! Everything in me rises up in protest against the thought of so much as suggesting tying up a splendid girl to such as I! Isabelle, why have you said it?"

"Because, dear Peter, I don't see it as you do," insisted Isabelle. "And, Peter, what if the splendid girl splendidly loves you? As she does, indeed she does! You pass over that as if it did not matter. It matters supremely. Justine loves you, Peter!"

"Isabelle," said Peter with a manner that surprised Isabelle, "I think that you are mistaken. I know that Justine loves me, but I do not think that I am essential to her happiness. She is a soul supremely intended to devote herself. She has been groping for God. She has loved me because she had not found her true end. Now she has found it. She would not be as happy if she were allowed to consecrate her life to me now—and I know she would



have done it, still would do it—as she would be if she soared untrammelled to her goal. I think I understand Justine Coburn better than you do. I have seen that she was ready to give me her life, and that her love for me is strong and deep. It will always be so, but not as it has been. Justine is not intended to fill her life with temporalities; she is one of those lonely souls created for God alone. She loves me, and wants me, turns to me, yet I know that if she and I could live together side by side in a cloister, as the saints of the East sometimes lived in the early centuries, she would ask no more. Is that love, the love that I would be excused for chaining to a cripple? Happy little wife and mother, is that what you call love? Justine's is the maiden soul that walks the earth unmated. It would be monstrous for me to discuss marrying any woman. It would be sacrilege for me to steal this creature of God, baiting the trap with her pity and her misunderstanding of herself. I hope that Justine will go to a cloister—unless I happen to die! Then I hope that she will live her cloistered life in the world and look after little Giles. I love Justine deeply, truly, best of all, as you say, unless it is Giles; comrade Giles, not the baby!—though I'm mighty fond of Spiffens! I'm glad we had this talk, after all; it will clear away confusion in your mind, won't it? And I've said to you what I would not say, even to Giles."

"Yes, Peter, it has settled the matter for me," said Isabelle slowly. "You are wrong, foolishly wrong to think that your lameness is an obstacle to happiness. But I am amazed to recognize how right you are in all else. I think that you have understood Justine better than I. I can see, the instant you put

it before me, that she has loved you because she had not found her end. It is likely, Peter, that what she loved in you, without realizing it, was that in you she dimly saw that End reflected! She is supremely the consecrated person, single-minded, devoted, indifferent to lesser things. She is a sort of Saint Teresa. You are right, Peter; I own it! But, oh, dear, dearest Peter the Great, what about yourself? We so want you to be happy! And I was so sure that Justine was to make you so!"

"Why, I'll be all right, Isa dear," said Peter. "I have Spiffens. He's going to be a great Spiffens, and a first rate intimate friend. Now I'm to be partner in the firm, I'll be rolling in riches! I foresee myself doing big things for little Peter and Spiffens, and for other, less lucky kids. I'm going to be so happy that I'll have to watch out for the jealous gods! You know they used to say that the gods grudged too much happiness to mortals! I'll have to shake these crutches at them often, to keep them in mind that I'm not running too fast on the golden way! When do you think you'll be ready to take me, and Spiffens, and Dominico home, Isabelle? It is time to start, isn't it? And Giles will be waiting, won't he?"

"I must see to Elizabeth first. Can you find a book? Or the two small boys, Peter?" asked Isabelle rising. "I'll whisk you home rapidly."

"Now, not too rapidly, Mrs. Guernsey," cried Peter. "I don't like to tax St. Christopher too far! You know I never had unlimited confidence in your mechanical talent! I wouldn't one bit mind letting you slay me, but spare Spiffens and Dominico!"

"You're no better than you used to be!" cried

Isabelle, pretending to be annoyed.

"And we're none of us any better than we ought to be!" retorted Peter, as she left the room.

It had been a delightful day, Peter decided that night, after he had presided over Giles' night prayers and been hugged hard by a solid little body, done up in shapeless flannelette casing, which was all in one piece, revealing how short its legs were, and how round its stomach.

Peter smoked his small briarwood pipe peacefully till he was sleepy, his own bedtime arrived. Then he knocked out the ashes of the pipe, wound the clock and went upstairs.

"Holiday to-morrow, All Saints!" he thought. "Nice day; I like to think of 'the multitude no man can number'! Indeed I told Isabelle the truth; I am a lucky fellow and happy on my nimble sticks!"

## CHAPTER XXV

*"The Kindest Man, the Best Conditioned and Unwearied Spirit in Doing Courtesies."*

"THIS is an All Saints' Day that would almost make us willing to wait to share the saints' glory, isn't it, Dominico?" Peter saluted Dominico down the stairs the next morning.

"It is so beautiful that I think it is to show us how fine heaven is, when we can get such days down here," replied Dominico, and Peter smiled his approval of this improvement upon his suggestion. "You are fixed up, Mr. Peter," added Dominico delicately.

Peter glanced down at the shoes which Dominico had polished.

"It does look dressy, doesn't it, Dominico, to see feet! We don't half realize how dressy feet are when we are born with them and never see them for a first time! I'll tell you, Dominico, I'm going to try to put up with the discomfort for the sake of the beauty. *Il faut souffrir pour être beau!* Which means: Never mind if it hurts; look fine and grin and bear it! That's a free translation, Dominico!" Peter looked around him as he spoke, and Dominico, quick to see, offered him his prayer-book.

"Thank you, Mind Reader!" said Peter, slipping it into his coat pocket. "I have decided, Dominico, that the junior partner of a prosperous house must look his best, so I'm going to try to get used to these things, and use two canes, instead of my crutches.

Say, Dominico, I believe I rather like to be a partner, after all!"

"Well, I'll say so!" cried Dominico.

"I've taken a new grip on life this morning, Dominico; I suppose it's the winey weather, but I do feel fit! Wait till I say good morning to the boy, then we'll go, though it is early."

"Mass, Gwawd?" inquired little Giles, looking up from his task of "cutting biscuits for the birds" with Mrs. Riordan's thimble, at the end of the kitchen table, upon which he sat, while Mrs. Riordan kneaded bread beyond him.

"Yes, sir, Mass!" cried Peter, rumpling the child's brilliant hair. "This is one of the days when your Guard has to go, *must*, you see! To-night I'll tell you your sleepy story all about what day it is, how there are great crowds upon crowds of people, all most beautiful and glorious, in heaven, whom we think about to-day! It's going to be a great story; just you wait till to-night, Spiffens!"

"All wight; Giles-I'll wait. He stays wight here waitin' all days," observed Giles justly. "But Giles-I could go to Mass hims ownse'f."

"Yes, but not quite yet; pretty soon. Next All Saints' Day your Guard can take you, small Giles-I, alias Spiffens! Good-bye, boy! Have those biscuits done when I get home." Peter bent to kiss a solid, rosy cheek.

Little Giles threw both arms around Peter's neck and hugged him hard.

"Bet God's glad to see my Gwawd when he comes in!" he said, with one of those unchildlike inspirations that all bright children have. "Huwwy up home, so Giles-I am glad, too! Nice Petwer-

Gwawd!"

"Nice Spiffens-boy!" retorted Peter, and turned away.

It was the Mass at eight o'clock which Peter had chosen to go to that morning. The church was well-filled, but not as crowded as at the Mass of six o'clock, which accommodated those whose day's work began at seven.

Peter, with Dominico watchful at his side, in case someone should heedlessly jostle him, went easily up to the rail. There was not much chance of Peter's being jostled; all the parish of St. John's knew Peter Cassett, admired him at longer or shorter range of acquaintance, and made his passage to the altar rail easy for him.

Peter could not kneel; he stood to receive the Host; little Father Coigne raised his hands to administer it to him, always with emotion, overwhelming, loving pity for this, his brave Peter the Great.

"*Corpus Domini nostri—custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam,*" murmured the priest, avoiding the communion card as he lifted his hands to Peter's lips.

Then Father Coigne—for Peter was the last to receive that morning—returned to the altar, and Peter to his place, sitting in the pew, his head dropped forward upon the back of the next pew.

It was a long time, longer than usual, before Peter raised his head and looked at Dominico, signifying his readiness to go.

"You say much in thanksgiving, Mr. Peter," observed Dominico. "Yet I suppose anyone who is intimate with Our Lord has much to say."

Peter laughed. "Well, Dominico, those who don't know Him at all, surely have much that needs say-

ing! I always repeat the *Adoro Te Devoïte*, you see; that last stanza—I I must teach it to you, Dominico, in English. *Jesu, quem velatum—oro, fiat, illud quod tam sitio!*” Dominico heard Peter murmur. “*Ut Te revelata!* Dominico, St. Thomas was inspired by the Holy Ghost. Would you like to tuck Spiffens under your arm and go away with me to be lay brothers in an Order, Dominico? I often half think that is what I’d like, and will do. But I’ve got to see a little farther first—and there is Spiffens!”.

They had taken a short-cut homeward, for Peter had delayed them longer than he had intended, and not only would Mrs. Riordan be annoyed by a good breakfast held back, but Peter was punctilious about his prompt arrival in the wareroom.

There were two blocks through which they passed in coming this way which were not only poor, but were infested with rowdy boys who managed to elude in relays, hard to distinguish apart, the truant officers, and thus by mutual support to dodge their education.

As Peter and Dominico came along a knot of this type of boys was gathered ahead of them.

“I wonder what they now do?” said Dominico, but not with interest, merely idle curiosity.

“I’m afraid they are hurting something; that’s their notion of having a perfect day,” said Peter, quickening his steps.

Suddenly he started forward, Peter-like, forgetful of his infirmity. He had seen that he had guessed right, that a big boy was unmercifully beating a forlorn, dirty little child, whose cries for help aroused no interest in that street, nor anything but laughter

from the boys standing around watching.

Peter ran to them, somehow, plying his two canes fast, not thinking to warn Dominico of his intention, not actually forming it in his own mind. Following his natural instinct Peter, the cripple, leaped to the rescue of a child abused, as Peter the athlete would have done.

He was not accustomed to these legs, to the shoes poor Dominico had so painstakingly polished, to the slender canes in his hands instead of the solid crutches beneath his armpits.

The canes slipped, Peter plunged heavily forward, and his head struck violently upon a large, jagged rock which had been placed at the curb in some of the neighborhood's mischievous expeditions.

The boys shouted gleefully when Peter fell, yet even they were silenced as the blood began to flow from an ugly cut in his temple. The wretched little child got on his feet and slipped rapidly away, whimpering as he ran, not stopping to see to what he owed his escape. Peter had rescued the child; he had attained the object of his endeavor, but he made no attempt to rise.

Dominico sprang to Peter's side, his face blanched with fear. He tried to raise him, turning his face up toward himself, but Peter lay unconscious; Dominico thought that he was dead, till he distinguished a movement in his pulse.

Dominico vainly tried to staunch the blood flowing from the wound; his handkerchief was quickly saturated. He looked around for help.

"Go for a doctor, run! Run! Isn't there one of you will help?" he cried.

"He was fer buttin' in," growled one of the boys;



no one moved.

But just then Justine, fearing to be late to Mass, and fearing no human thing, came down the street in her car, taking the short way, driving as fast as she dared, but still not fast, through the narrow, congested way.

She saw the crowd, now greatly increased, and she recognized Dominico, white and horror-stricken, waving to her. She stopped her car and sprang out. Then she saw Peter.

A groan burst from her lips that had its roots in her heart, but she did not hesitate.

"Put him in the car," Justine ordered, and the crowd, obeying her imperious gesture, her certainty that she would be obeyed, did for her what it had refused to do for Dominico. Three of the bigger boys helped Dominico raise Peter. They placed him in Justine's car, Dominico supporting him as best he could, and Justine once more took the wheel.

"Father Coigne's house is nearest, a minute from here, driving," Justine said, and rushed Peter to the priest's house.

The assistant, young Father Lennon, was to say the half past nine o'clock Mass, which was also the last Mass of the day. So Father Coigne himself, not long up from his breakfast table, responded to Dominico's frantic summons on the bell.

"Well, well, why this haste—Peter! Dominico, what is it?" gasped the priest, seeing Peter's blood-stained body upheld by Justine in the car.

"Don't tell me now! Get men in the church! Get a man with a car to rush the doctor here! Run, Dominico!" Father Coigne added.

In five minutes they had Peter in the house, on

Father Coigne's own bed. In half an hour the doctor was there.

He examined Peter, gently laid down the hand he had held to try the pulse, touched sorrowfully the wounded head, and shook his own.

"Not the least thing to be done," he said. "It is a deep wound, and a bad concussion. I doubt that he recovers consciousness, but if he does it will be only to go out. Peter Cassett is done for, finished."

"He received his Viaticum at the eight o'clock Mass," said Father Coigne, tears running down his cheeks. "I will anoint him, but thank God, my Peter the Great is ready."

Giles and Isabelle were called; Mrs. Riordan came, but not little Giles; he had been taken by Giles out to stay with his own boy. They would not let him see his Guard like this. Mr. Coburn came, and stood suffering silently beside the bed. He loved Peter tenderly. And his girl, his poor, poor Justine!

Motionless, speechless, Justine knelt beside Peter, unconscious, through the long time—or was it a short time? she did not know—while they waited for Peter to be set free.

Father Coigne read the prayers for the dying, the committal of the passing soul, but Justine did not move.

Giles knelt on the other side of the bed, with one of Peter's hands in his, bowed and ashen, also silent, his eyes fixed upon his dear old Hermit, hoping for one more word before the unbroken silence set in. Only yesterday they had been happy together, as if they were still boys, and now! So swiftly, so suddenly, and, Giles thought, again for such an inadequate cause, Peter was stricken down! Thank God

they had had yesterday together! Thank God there was no shadow of change, nor of the sadder separation upon their perfect friendship! And beside Giles knelt Isabelle, sobbing bitterly.

Peter did not regain consciousness, at least he did not speak.

His eyes opened; they rested on Giles, and then on Justine, and stayed upon her face. Father Coigne laid the crucifix which Peter always wore upon his heart, against the lips that almost seemed to smile, and, with a fluttering, irregular breath or two, Father Coigne's Peter the Great, on their own feast, passed into that "multitude which no man can number."

Peter had been dead a month. With each day that passed it became more and more difficult to think of Peter as dead. His splendid vitality, his courage, his boyish love of fun, his spirit of play, which he had never allowed his misfortune to quench, made Peter Cassett more and more living as the days went by. His taking off had been so swift that those who loved him were only beginning to emerge from the daze that kept them, like Canis Major, wondering why he did not come.

They had found that Peter had made his will, acting on Father Coigne's hint; it was dated but a few days later than the day on which that suggestion had been made him. The will was brief, clear and simple. Peter had left everything that he possessed to his "adopted son, Giles Esperance Cassett, to be used as she saw fit by Justine Coburn, whom he appointed sole executor and guardian of the child."

Justine had accepted the trust thankfully. She had gone to stay in Peter's house till his lease should

expire, thinking that it would be kinder to Mrs. Riordan and Dominico to keep on the house, letting them get accustomed to the change gradually. Later Justine would take the child into her own home.

Mrs. Riordan wept daily, but she was becoming adjusted; she fell back on the comforting thought of Peter's happiness, and especially that he now could get about unimpeded.

"Sure it was a crool thing to see the likes of him on them crutches, no matter how light he made of 'um, an' there never was wan laughed at himself so gaily, wid so little reason! The heart is broke in me body for the loss of 'um, yet am I glad he's out of a world that holds little enough for the luckiest of us!" the good soul cried.

It was Dominico who grieved his heart out, almost as dumbly as Canis Major. Dog and boy, they both found comfort in devotion to little Giles, but Dominico could not adjust to his loss.

"I think I'll go be a lay brother," he said to Father Coigne. "My Peter talked of our going, both of us."

"To be a priest, Dominico, and say Mass for Peter!" cried Father Coigne. "You will not be too old when you are ordained, and think how Peter will rejoice."

"And me!" cried Dominico, the first smile he had worn since the day of his grief breaking over his face. "Peter then would see what he had done when he taught me, would he?"

Father Coigne, Isabelle and Giles had come to tea with Justine; they were waiting for her to come down when Father Coigne had inspired Dominico with hope.

Justine came into the room, and with her was her father. Mr. Coburn looked grave, unhappy. He looked like what he was, a lonely man. Giles had grown years older in the loneliness which he was bearing. Life without the Hermit was to Giles a thing that lacked clues to its form and meaning. He could not understand! That was the abiding feeling; he wanted Peter, he hungered for him, and—he could not understand! Yet Giles's eyes were not like Mr. Coburn's eyes, mournful, hopeless. Mr. Coburn grieved for Peter, he missed him daily, hourly; everyone missed him at his place of business. Mr. Owen said that it seemed to him as if someone had taken away the floor; Peter was like a foundation.

Micky Roache could not talk of Peter; he sobbed when he tried to, and found his one first ray of consolation in fighting—and beating—Ben Levy when he laughed at him.

But Mr. Coburn was desolate. It was not only the loss of Peter; it was the loss of much else. Everything in life, in spite of his success, had disappointed him, except Justine! Justine was all and more than he had thought her.

Mr. Coburn did not stay now; he shook hands all around and went away. Justine returned to her friends, having closed the outer door behind her father, tall, pale and gracious, her expression half-sad, yet half-joyful. Justine Coburn at last was growing beautiful.

She wore a white gown, simply made of some sort of soft woolen material; it fell in long lines around her tall, almost emaciated figure, and over her shoulders lay a deep collar of black lynx fur.

"Oh, Justine, you look like a Dominican nun!"

cried Isabelle.

Justine smiled, glancing downward over her skirt. "Do I? That's nice; I'll take it as a sign," she said. "I wanted to enter an Order, but now that I have the baby to bring up I think, perhaps, I'm meant to stay in the world. Father Coigne suggests that I become a tertiary, and try to make my home my own small cloister. So isn't it delightful that you prophecy as you do, seeing me as if in the Dominican habit?"

"Justine, you look—almost—happy!" cried Isabelle, wondering, half resenting it.

"I am not *almost*, but quite happy, Isabelle dear," said Justine quietly. "I am happier than I ever thought I could be. 'All my wants are well-supplied!' That is a nice hymn of Doctor Watts, which you people probably escaped learning, as I did, when you were little. My soul, my mind, my hands are filled; what would you more?"

Giles looked up, but did not speak; Isabelle spoke for him.

"How can you help missing him, Justine?"

"Oh, Isa, dear, did I say I didn't miss him? Don't you know how I depended on him? I miss him every hour, but I'm beginning to feel that I have him as never before," Justine spoke quite simply and sincerely. "And his eyes looked last at Giles and me, last of all at me! And you told me, Isabelle, how he spoke of me on that last day, at your house. And he showed me his Faith, and he has bequeathed to me his one close link to earth! I am deeply happy, even when my tears fall. It breaks my heart when the baby cries for him, as he does at night, yet I want him to miss him. I'm trying to tell little Giles the 'sleepy story' that Peter always told him at bed-

time, and he cries less often for his Gwawd! Dear little Spiffens!"

"Don't, Justine!" cried Giles sharply, unable to hear Peter's absurd pet name for the boy.

"Oh, don't you like it?" cried Justine. "I'm sorry, Giles; I won't! I love to keep the echoes of his voice in the air, you see. Our Peter cannot die; he was so vital, so splendid! I think he wants us to be happy, keeping him in mind, as if it were a perpetual All Saints' Day!"

"Justine, Peter was right about you! I see it now as he did. You are quite happy, though you love and want him, because you feel consecrated, devoted. Justine, Justine, you have the nun's heart! Peter knew you; Peter was right! I am not sure that you are not as great as he, greater, perhaps," Isabelle said, still wondering.

"Oh, no; I'm not handicapped as Peter was; only think how he faced the world under it!" cried Justine proudly.

"He asked no allowance for his handicap," said Father Coigne, also with pride, like Justine's, in their hero. "He asked no allowance from man, nor from Almighty God."

"Oh, Father Coigne!" exclaimed Isabelle somewhat shocked.

"Did he?" demanded the priest. "How many of us mortals are there who don't ask Him to remember their handicap, bad temper, violent passions, poverty, loneliness, ill health? When did Peter Cassett ever whine, ever say: 'Remember I'm lame, God, and let me off from my duty, my jollity, my part among men?' He never pleaded a handicap, not even in his thoughts, and a month ago to-day wasn't

he a victor?"

"I think the thing that hits me hardest, Father, is that it all, both times, seemed to be done for such miserable objects," said Giles. "Mutilated for that drunkard; dead in an attempt to save a forlorn child from too severe a beating!"

"He was mutilated to save a soul; wouldn't Peter say that was worth while? 'I've got that poor creature where he'll die as we all hope to die. And the child? It was pure charity, a chivalric impulse, precisely like Peter. No, no, Giles; don't look at things by our penny dips, you know!'" said Father Coigne gently.

Justine spoke slowly, her lovely voice filled with sweetness, her glorious eyes shining with the reflection of what Peter was seeing.

"I think that's the best part of it all, Giles dear," she said. "Our splendid boy died with a sort of humility in all his glory. What could there be greater than an insignificant end, yet significant of his un-failing pity, his readiness to do service to the lowliest? Could there be a greater death for Peter the Great?"

No one answered her. Justine's new vision of eternal verities was farther sighted than theirs.

Little Giles trotted into the room, shining from a recent scrubbing, his bright hair now curling all over his head. His hand rested on Canis Major, and dog and child came over to Justine, leaning against her white gown, looking up at her, Canis Major wistfully, but the baby with bubbling laughter in his eyes.

"There's a fine supper, Justine," he said. "Ridie told me to say come, evwybody!"



Justine bent over and kissed Giles' topmost curl, at the same time running her fingers through Canis Major's long hair.

"Come, then, Father, Isabelle, Giles the First! We must eat the 'fine supper' while it's hot! Come, Canis; you always were allowed, weren't you? Come, little Legacy, my precious!" Justine took the baby's hand and rose, tall, dignified, with a shining face above her white gown and black fur, the semblance of the Dominican habit.. "There's so much left to do, and so much waiting beyond it! Indeed, and in truth, I am happy!" she said, and fell back, holding Peter's adopted son's hand, to let her guests precede her to supper.

THE END

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